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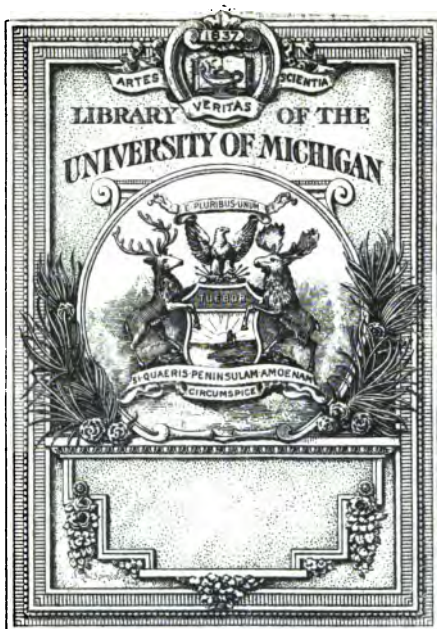
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## THE SMITHY

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# THE SMITHY

A DRAMA

By

ROBERT SOUTH, LL.B

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LONDON

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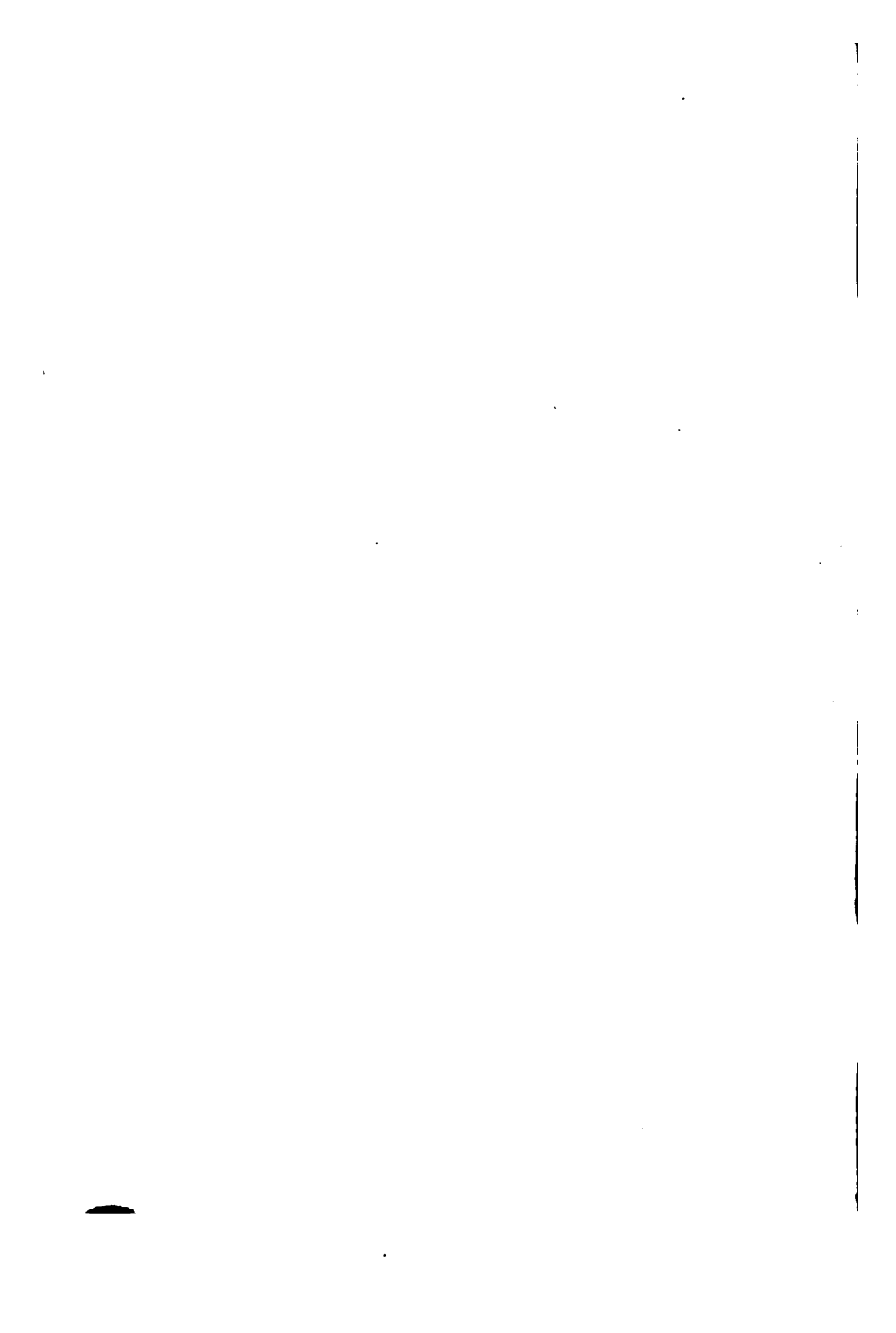
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To my wife  
Alda

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## THE CHARACTERS OF THE DRAMA

LOUIS VAUTIER . . . . .	A Smith
STEFFAN . . . . .	His apprentice
AURÈLE FELDER . . . . .	A wood carver, in love with Brenda
DOCTOR STULTZ . . . . .	
PASTOR ANKER . . . . .	
TANCRÈDE MASSON . . . . .	A friend of Felder's
A YOUNG MAN . . . . .	
MARIE VAUTIER . . . . .	Wife to Louis Vautier
BRENDA . . . . .	Their daughter
MÈRE VAUTIER . . . . .	The mother of Louis Vautier
ANNA ASPER . . . . .	Sister to Madame Vautier
BETTA	} . . . . . Brenda's companions
JEANNETTE	
ANGELICA	
GRETCHEN	

*The action of the Play takes place in  
the town of Neuchâtel, during the early  
part of the seventeenth century.*

# “THE SMITHY ”

## ACT I

The living room in the house of Vautier the Smith. It is simply and plainly furnished, the few articles of furniture being made for service and not for ornament. On the right a large open fireplace, beside which is placed a large, heavy armchair ; in the centre, a small table. A doorway in the right hand corner of the rear wall is the principal entrance to the house from without. Two others (one also in the rear, and one on the left) admit to the inner rooms.

For some time a number of young girls have been engaged in decorating the room with evergreens, their task being almost completed as the curtain rises.

## THE SMITHY

JEANNETTE (*standing upon a chair, and surveying the rear wall*). Now, the question is, what rope shall we use to run from door to door? Have you one prepared? 'Twill need to be long.

BETTA. Oh, take the laurel one! We have plenty of sprays left to add to it, if there is occasion. I think it is not far short.

ANGELICA. There is the hawthorn! I finished it half an hour ago.

JEANNETTE. Ah! *that* has thorns.

ANGELICA. Well, what matters! Dear Brenda will not finger them.

JEANNETTE. Faugh! You have not a particle of sentiment, Angelica. How would you like to enter for your betrothal underneath an arch of thorns? 'Tis enough to bring bad luck for a lifetime.

ANGELICA (*laughing*). Well, if not sentimental, I have plenty of common-sense. Give me the chance of a betrothal, and I would creep through them. I'm not particular.

BETTA. Oh, you're brave amongst us girls! You will sing a different tune when we have to decorate for you—when red-haired Karl manages to make up his mind.

ANGELICA (*nettled*). He is no redder now than

## THE SMITHY

when you, Betta, used to look out for his coming home.

BETTA. Ah! 'twas always dusk then, or the long winter months, and **not so noticeable**. But in the sunshine! (*with a gesture of disgust.*) Pah! But perhaps I am too fastidious.

ANGELICA (*stingingly*). Yes, you were foolish not to keep to the dusk. Every woman is passable in the twilight.

(*The girls laugh at the sally.*)

GRETCHEN. Don't meddle with thorns, Betta, or with Angelica, or you are sure to be scratched.

BETTA (*piqued*). She is welcome to her Karl. I do not envy him.

JEANNETTE. Don't quarrel, girls; at least for to-day! The betrothal party will be here before the hour. We must hurry and get finished with our decorations.

ANGELICA. I did not begin. *She* said Karl was red-haired!

JEANNETTE. And what matters the colour so long as not grey? The colour will not stop any of us, provided the heart is right. Now, give me the rope—not the laurel,—laurel stands for friendship, not love.

BETTA. Here is a fir one!

JEANNETTE. The very thing! Brenda will come

## THE SMITHY

through *this* doorway, her lover Aurèle through *that*. We ought to have the best. Give me the fir, for the fir is the emblem of undying love! (*They hand her a long rope of entwined fir.*) I shall run it from door to door. Betta, will you take the other end? (*She proceeds to arrange the fir rope across the rear wall.*)

BETTA. You want it to droop under the letters?

JEANNETTE. Just enough to break the stiffness.  
That will do.

GRETCHEN. Well, no one will grudge the best to Brenda.

ANGELICA. Give *me* the hawthorn with all its thorns. I see no beauty in your fir.

JEANNETTE. Ah, I said you had no sentiment, Angelica! *This* never changes, summer or winter. Snow will not injure, the sun will not wither. Never altering nor varying. What could be a better symbol? (*singing*)

“Oh, fir tree, fir tree, strong and true,  
Like thee shall my true lover be.”

ANGELICA (*scornfully*). Well, your true love will probably prove dull and stupid, if his moods and ways never vary. Only a cat wants to blink, and sleep day after day. I stick to the hawthorn; leafless to-day—to-morrow bursting its green



## THE SMITHY

buds beneath the kiss of the sun—and later, a cloud of blossom, scenting the whole air. *That* is what love should be. For ever changing, for ever winning, and for ever lost.

GRETCHEN. Then we shall decorate your betrothal day, Angelica, with hawthorn. Only you must arrange it for May time, or there will be no cloud of blossoms. But Jeannette, you said just now that colour was nothing. Did you not ?

JEANNETTE. Yes ; so long as the heart was right.

GRETCHEN. Well, for myself I see no difference. But father was talking to mother about the very same thing yesterday.

BETTA (*mischievously*). Has *he* any objection to red—I mean auburn hair ?

GRETCHEN. Oh, father has strange ideas. You know what peculiar things he says at times ! Yesterday, he would have the world will never learn wisdom. If it did, he says, a fair-haired flaxen man or woman would be the last to be chosen.

ANGELICA (*who is fair*). Well, I never !

JEANNETTE. I cannot see why *he* should object.

GRETCHEN. Oh, he says it is a sign of weakness. That the weakness is somewhere, either physical or moral—just like the white fetlocks of a horse.

## THE SMITHY

JEANNETTE. He must have been speaking of Aurèle — Brenda's husband to be. Aurèle is fair, fair-haired like a girl.

GRETCHEN (*quickly*). Yes; he was speaking of Aurèle.

BETTA. Well, Aurèle is not weak. You would not say so if you saw the chips fly from his chisel when he is carving, and he has never had a day's illness.

GRETCHEN. I said the same, but father only shook his head. "It may be so," he said; "it may be so. I will not deny it. For all that, I do not buy of choice a horse with white stockings."

JEANNETTE. Your white stockings are as silly as Angelica's hawthorn blossoms! Aurèle is as manly as any young fellow in Neu-châtel; and Brenda—well, Brenda is the sweetest and best. So good luck to them both (*surveying her decorations*). There, I have finished! Will it do?

*(Steffan enters from left—a young man about twenty-five. The face is honest, but marked with a certain heaviness. Physically, there is a similar tendency, the strong, well-built frame displaying power rather than grace.)*

STEFFAN (*approvingly*). I should say so. The

## THE SMITHY

place has never looked so beautiful in the whole six years I have been apprenticed. A pity it will not last.

JEANNETTE. Oh, it is you, Steffan! I thought it was Monsieur Vautier come to scurry us off.

ANGELICA (*teasing.*) Yes, only Steffan! Come to see the decorations for the betrothal of his master's daughter! And they might have been for his own, with a little more courage. Don't you think so, Steffan?

STEFFAN. I am only his apprentice.

ANGELICA. Psha! And who have better opportunities than apprentices to see their master's daughters? Gretchen will tell you the same. Won't you, Gretchen? We know now why her father chose black Jules.

(*The girls laugh.*)

STEFFAN (*confused.*) I—I—never thought of it, even if every silly girl believed it likely. Besides, Brenda is too good, too good for such as I.

ANGELICA. Rubbish! Young men do not talk like that if they have never thought of the matter. They are not so modest as a rule—at least, not apprentices.

## THE SMITHY

BETTA. Nor do they stick so close to their work bench, and shun the rest of us girls, except their eyes are fixed elsewhere.

STEFFAN (*goaded*). I didn't come here to discuss myself, or Brenda with you—you she gad-flies!

*(The girls burst into laughter.)*

Yes; you she gad-flies!

ANGELICA. "She gad-flies" is naughty, Steffan! Linnets, and larks, and love birds, you may call us. But gad-flies! Oh, that is rude!

STEFFAN. I did not come to call you anything, but to tell you, you must be done with your decorating. The room must be ready for the betrothal ceremony.

ANGELICA. Did Mamma or Papa Vautier say so?

JEANNETTE. Oh, leave off teasing him, Angelica! Come, let us clear the rubbish away, and put the room in order!

GRETCHEN. Jeannette is right. Betta, you and the others collect the branches. I shall tidy up the floor. We will not be long, Steffan. (*She begins to sweep up the scattered leaves, the others gathering the unused boughs.*)

ANGELICA (*placing a spray of hawthorn in her bosom*).

## THE SMITHY

Well, fir tree or laurel, I shall keep to my hawthorn.

BETTA. Ah, but you do not place it in your waist belt! Do you think the thorns might prove in the way?

ANGELICA. So *you* have learnt that! Tell us when! Was he cross?

JEANNETTE (*her arms full of green branches*). Now everything is finished. With luck, we shall be in time for the ceremony.

ANGELICA (*her arms also full*). Till then, my modest Steffan, *au revoir*! And never mind if one will not dance. There are others to choose from.

STEFFAN. For goodness' sake, be off with you.

JEANNETTE. Come along, girls! You, Gretchen, bring the basket!

*(The girls retire through the main doorway at rear, Jeannette humming the refrain—*

“Oh, fir tree, fir tree, strong and true,  
Like you shall my true lover be.”)

STEFFAN (*to himself*). Gad-flies, gad-flies! How they sting! And each word is true. Ah, God, how true!

*(Brenda enters through left doorway at rear, a young girl in all the charm of early womanhood. She is dressed in the bridal costume of the time.)*

## THE SMITHY

STEFFAN (*turning and speaking in a half whisper*).  
Brenda !

BRENDA. Yes, Steffan, only myself ! I wanted to glance at the decorations, to see how they had arranged the room. I should never know if I waited. Aurèle and I will remember little beyond our troth plight.

STEFFAN. Why should you ? But others will remember, and never forget.

BRENDA. How bright they have made it ! Oh, it is prettier, prettier than I thought. The old room seems to have burst into Spring ! Nothing but blossom and green leaves. It could not be more beautiful (*pointing to a wreath suspended in the centre of the room*). See, there is the wreath of myrtle, which if any pass under, hand in hand, will mean a future wedding. And Grandmother's chair is not forgotten ; nor the dear old hearth. And look, Steffan (*pointing to the rear wall*), *there !* They have worked our initials—Aurèle's and mine—and bound them with true lovers' knots.

STEFFAN. Ay ! I cut the letters. I could do so little.

BRENDA. I might have known. I should have guessed.

## THE SMITHY

STEFFAN. I am so glad you like them. The old room should look its brightest for you. If not for you, I know not for whom. For this day, at least, let it smile.

BRENDA. You speak as if Summer were ending ; and yet Spring is only budding.

STEFFAN. What matters what the month may be when the sunshine has fled. And, Brenda, in a little while, when you have gone, what will brighten these rooms ? If there be no laughter, the merrymaking is only a make-believe. Without the sun the summer winds are cold. And *you* are the sunshine, the laughter, the joy of the place !

BRENDA. I do not go far—not so far away.

STEFFAN. No ; not far ! But far enough to lose the laughter, and miss the warmth. There is no need to go as far as Aurèle's home ; a few paces are sufficient. There may be only a wall between two houses ; but on one side is happiness, on the other misfortune and misery. A few inches are often the dividing line.

BRENDA (*gently laying a hand upon his arm*). Steffan !

STEFFAN. Yes, Brenda !

BRENDA. Forgive me for my blindness. I never thought—I never stopped to think ; but

## THE SMITHY

now I know—and my heart aches for your sorrow.

STEFFAN (*clumsily attempting to hide his feelings*).  
You *must* not grieve for any one to-day.  
I spoke as others would speak—your father, your mother—all who will lose you. But what right have they—what right have I to complain? Some one must win you; and Aurèle has won.

BRENDA. You have never spoken like this before.  
Ah, Steffan, dear Steffan, forgive me!

STEFFAN. I meant nothing, Brenda—nothing.  
There is naught to forgive.

BRENDA (*passing her hands across her eyes*). Ah, yes! my eyes are opened. Now I understand so much that before was unheeded—the hundred acts of kindness—the constant gentleness—the silent love. Ah, God, if I could only have softened it; for your sake, Steffan, for your sake!

STEFFAN. Yes, Brenda, it is true; it is true.  
Why should I hide it now? I could not help loving you. I would not, if I could.

BRENDA. And the fault is mine!

STEFFAN. There is no fault; no, none. I saw you come and go. I needed no more. You offered no encouragement, neither a word nor a glance. A thousand times I have told myself the same. But that



## THE SMITHY

did not check me. 'Twas you, and your dear self.

BRENDA. Steffan, you must forget. There is no other remedy, only forgetfulness.

STEFFAN. Forget ! It is impossible. One might as well forget the Matterhorn out yonder. God made it and you more peerless than the rest. How can one forget ?

BRENDA. And now ?

STEFFAN. Even though you go, I still may love you.

BRENDA. I can offer nothing. I have given all—elsewhere.

STEFFAN. I ask nothing, Brenda. My love is no wrong to you, or to him. I knew always you loved Aurèle ; ay, long before the others. Without eyes, I could have learnt it. For knowing every tone of your voice, could I fail to detect the sweeter note when he came ? I listened for it—watched for it—though it never rang for me.

BRENDA. To-day should have been so happy. I wanted all to partake of my joy. And it spells sadness ! Ah, Steffan, I shall never forget.

STEFFAN. But it should not trouble you ; Brenda, it *must* not trouble you. I have learnt my lesson, not to-day, but long ago. I

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can even rejoice. Not all may possess, but all may admire.

BRENDA. And Aurèle ! You bear him no ill will ?

STEFFAN. Ill will ! Why should I ? There has been no wrong. He is your well-beloved. If I had won, would Aurèle frown ? I do not think so.

BRENDA. He would not, Steffan, I swear it. And I love him ; ah, Steffan, how I love him ! Such love as you have given to me, I have given to him. I cannot measure it. You must understand. It is not merely happiness. My whole life is merged in his ; his love is my very breath. If it meant poverty and misery, still I must go with him. I could not do otherwise. The good God must have willed it.

STEFFAN. I understand. But there is no fear of poverty or misery. Aurèle's love is so strong ; and there is no better carver in the country. His skill is sought by every one. The work in the Church alone should keep him employed for years. At least, with Aurèle you will taste neither.

MDME. VAUTIER (*calling from the inner room at rear*).  
Brenda ! Brenda ! Where are you, child ?

## THE SMITHY

BRENDA. Mother is calling ; I must go. What you have said, I shall never forget.

STEFFAN. But let it not trouble you. Only remember, there is always one nearer than a friend—and yet no more.

MDME. VAUTIER (*entering from rear*). Ah, there you are ! I have been looking for you everywhere, child. Doctor Stultz has sent you the most beautiful ear-rings. They were his wife's. You must put them on. Oh, they are lovely !

BRENDA. Dear old doctor ! He is always giving.

MDME. VAUTIER. Of a truth, I had none like them when I was betrothed. They are turquoises, dainty blue turquoises. Your's should be a happy future.

BRENDA (*lightly*). Do you think, mother, if you had had them, the future would have been brighter ?

MDME. VAUTIER. The future, child ! I have no future. I have enough to think of the present, with all the preparations for receiving the guests ; and your father, ordering this and that. Come, till I finish your dressing ! And you, Steffan, will you tap the wine casks ?

STEFFAN. With pleasure, Mistress.

(*He retires through door on left.*)

MDME. VAUTIER (*kissing Brenda*). You are a bonnie

## THE SMITHY

lass, my child ; you are a bonnie lass.  
Though 'tis only your mother says so.  
Come, dear !

*(They retire through doorway leading to  
the rooms at rear.)*

*(Louis Vautier and Doctor Stultz enter  
from left. Each is representative, both  
physically and mentally, of two different  
types. The former is a man of about fifty,  
heavily and powerfully built. He has dis-  
carded his working clothes for the festal  
occasion, and the effect only accentuates  
his ponderous strength. The face is in  
keeping ; firm, possibly harsh ; obstinate  
and, if crossed, unyielding. The latter is  
older, verging, as his white hairs show, on  
seventy. Beyond these, however, there are  
few signs of old age. The eyes are bright  
and keen ; the face, fresh and clear. As  
compared with the Smith, his slight frame  
seems almost frail. In speech and bear-  
ing, the Doctor is a kindly, courteous  
gentleman—one who has witnessed with  
sympathy the struggles and weaknesses of  
life.)*

VAUTIER (*advancing*). The women folk have gone  
after upsetting the house, and look at

## THE SMITHY

the result ! I can scarcely believe it is my own place, though I have lived in it most of my lifetime. What think you, Doctor ?

STULTZ. Charming, friend Vautier, charming ; I love to see the old home budding and sprouting like an old tree. And why not ? Nature's Spring is only the prelude to the maternity of Summer. And for a day such as this, even the old timbers should deck themselves (*laughing and drawing attention to a flower he is wearing.*) You see, old as I am, I have not forgotten.

VAUTIER. Wearing a nosegay ! It never entered my head.

STULTZ. Not too late ! The sturdiest oak does not disdain at times to adorn itself with the softest foliage, nor in doing so does it lose its sturdiness (*selecting a flower from the decorations*). We are not so old and leafless. Let us show the young trees we still have life and sap.

VAUTIER (*refusing the flower*). No, thank you, Doctor. I cannot deck myself like a maypole.

STULTZ. Tush, friend Vautier ! Everything in its season. And, after all, the maypole confers more happiness than a scaffolding pole.

## THE SMITHY

VAUTIER. Maypoles ! Thank Heaven we have them no longer. The great Calvin has swept them away, with other wickednesses, to the limbo of Hell. Life is no longer a round of dancing and laughter—at least in Neuchâtel. *He* taught us the truth—to follow it as a pilgrimage, and not a festival—to crush out the wiles of Satan—to live soberly. And, thank God, in Neuchâtel and Geneva we live the life.

STULTZ. Yes, yes ; I have naught to say against the great Calvin. He has reformed Geneva, and here. And he deserves every credit. In the whole world there are not two towns as religious and God-fearing. They should be when the Ministers and Elders of the Church, such as you, take everything under their cognisance. When attendance at Church is as regular and as compulsory as supper ; when extravagances are forbidden, and the slightest levity reported and nipped in the bud. It must be a very small thing, a very small thing to escape. Yes ; the place is reformed and God-fearing ; but a trifle dull, friend Vautier, a trifle dull.

## THE SMITHY

VAUTIER. In some things, Doctor, you are a child—a perfect child.

STULTZ. Ah, yes. I fear that must be the reason. Nature has sprinkled my head with snow, and left the heart young. I am sure you pity me, you and all the Elders of the Church. For you are all so old, so old and practical. Hence your rigid regulation for every detail of a man's life ; your control over every hour of his day. Of course, there is no sin—wickedness requires some latitude. For the Church rules everything—religion, morals, dress, and business.

VAUTIER. 'Tis the glory of Calvinism that it is no lip service of one day out of seven. If a religion is worthy, it must be lived day by day, and hour by hour. Like a tree, it must be judged by its fruits, not its blossom.

STULTZ. Yes, yes. I do not question. For men, well-matured men and women, your code is admirable and workable. But, my friend, your flock is not all grown up. There are children—boys and lasses. I am speaking for them. A little less discipline, a little more happiness, and they will be better men and women. The blossom has its beauty ;

## THE SMITHY

and there is always the promise of fruit. That is why I love to see this one festivity retained. Once, there were so many similar.

VAUTIER. You are hungering after the flesh pots.

STULTZ. Not for myself—only for the young. Nature, after all, is our great architect. Give her freedom to work in—not license, my friend—and she will produce her best. Cramp her, and the result is mediocrity. Your attempt to mould all into one pattern will only end in failure and disappointment.

VAUTIER (*with a laugh*). Then Nature, if she never errs, did well in giving you no children. You would have spoiled them from their cradle.

STULTZ. Perhaps! I have tended the advent of many, yet always in awe and reverence. In a helpless babe all the riddles of the universe lie awaiting an answer. For each little one is the breath of God made manifest.

VAUTIER. I shall not get angry with you. You credit us with years and common-sense. Well, even man, made in the image of his Creator, will sink without guidance to the level of the brute. But here



## THE SMITHY

comes the Pastor himself. He will argue the question.

*(Pastor Anker enters from left—a short, spare individual, about fifty years of age. In temperament, quick, keen, and fanatical—intellectual, yet lacking in sympathy,—just, yet devoid of mercy. In short, one who is wholly convinced of the rectitude of his views of life, and is prepared to enforce them without deviation.)*

ANKER. A question to be discussed? I should have thought there was only one to-day—the betrothal of friend Vautier's daughter.

VAUTIER. Oh, that is beyond the boundary of discussion. The Doctor is objecting to the strict guidance we enforce on our young people. Wants everything left to Nature.

ANKER *(with a superior smile)*. Ah! Doctor Stultz is not a father. Experience teaches otherwise. Sentiment will never conquer sin. The lever of righteousness is the rod of discipline.

STULTZ. You are right, if humanity is like a bar of iron in Vautier's forge—only worthless until hammered and beaten into shape.

## THE SMITHY

Then your rod of discipline is the most suitable agent. But if it is something better, say a delicate, wonderful, sensitive seedling, then love and loving care will produce a nobler maturity.

**ANKER.** Do not let us theorise, Stultz. Let us be practical. Forty years ago this town was no better than any other. You can remember it. Drunkenness, loose living, extravagance, and irreligion were rampant. Scarcely the fit soil for delicate seedlings! You know it to-day. Is there a city more orderly? Those vices are now unknown. Was the broom which swept them out gentleness and love? Psha! Humanity is not driven so gently. The broom was a stern Religion; a Religion which did not preach alone, but commanded; and saw its commands were obeyed. Yes; a Religion which enforced its precepts on every individual, and on every incident of his life, to which nothing was alien, from his rising up to his lying down, from his cradle to the grave.

**STULTZ.** True! A man must rise in the morning at the time the Church appoints, or he is fined—must work the prescribed hours, or he is fined—and must sleep

## THE SMITHY

when the Church bell warns that all lights are to be extinguished, even if he be sleepless, or again he is fined. Yes ; order is everywhere. Discipline is triumphant. Still, it might have achieved more, if linked with Love.

ANKER. Love, Doctor, as you perceive to-day, is not forgotten. But Love has also learnt its duties (*to Vautier*). And speaking of this betrothal, I should mention to you, friend Vautier, something which has come to my knowledge. Stultz should see in it an instance of the Church's care for all her flock.

VAUTIER. Is it a case for reproof or punishment ? The fault must call for prompt action to broach it now.

ANKER. A remedy can never be too prompt. Stultz will admit that. To cauterise early is always wiser than a late amputation.

STULTZ (*smiling*). Your simile disarms me. But be sure that the disease is there. Fancy often breeds imaginary complaints.

ANKER. In this case there is no doubt—none (*to Vautier*). And it concerns your future son-in-law, Aurèle Felder.

VAUTIER (*startled*). Aurèle ! Brenda's lover !

ANKER. Yes ; your daughter's betrothed. That

## THE SMITHY

the young man is closely connected with your family makes my solicitude the keener.

VAUTIER (*earnestly*). Do not say, Pastor, that he has fallen away! His fault must be a small one; the lad bears a good name. If there were the slightest doubt I would not have accepted him for Brenda.

ANKER. It may prove mere thoughtlessness. A word of advice from you, her father, may remove the error. But the position must be ended.

VAUTIER (*warmly*). If there is aught, man, can you not speak?

ANKER (*reprovingly*). Patience, friend Vautier; patience! News quickly learnt is often rashly judged. The trouble is this. Ten days ago Aurèle received a visitor into his house—a stranger to the district.

VAUTIER. I have heard nothing of him.

ANKER (*drily*). Possibly! Still, to me the fact was reported. At first I gave it no attention. But the stranger made no appearance at any service of the Church, and I began to make inquiries.

STULTZ. Quite naturally.

ANKER. I called on Aurèle, and saw his friend. They were working together. A narrow-

## THE SMITHY

chested, unhealthy stripling; utterly worthless as an assistant.

STULTZ. Why not be honest, Pastor, and say a poor unfortunate, half dying from consumption?

ANKER. I am not a doctor. I describe only what I saw. So you have seen this newcomer?

STULTZ (*quietly*). Yes; I have seen him.

ANKER. Then perhaps Stultz will give you the rest of his history?

STULTZ (*coldly*). My profession has its confidences as well as yours. I have nothing to say.

ANKER (*to Vautier*). Then I must tell you. This unhealthy stripling is one Tancrède Masson, the son of François Masson, the renegade who led the riots in Zurich. Yes; your future son-in-law is harbouring a heretic, an Anabaptist. It cost us blood and tears to stamp out the cursed heresy; one cannot parley with the Devil and his mockeries. And is it to be planted here again, after all our garnering? You will do well, Master Vautier, to root it out.

VAUTIER (*fiercely*). You need not remind me of my duty, Pastor. François Masson and I have old scores to settle. I know their communistic, devilish cant. There shall

## THE SMITHY

be no parleying. If Felder continue to hold out the hand of fellowship to this atheist, with me and mine he parts company ; even if he and my daughter stood before the altar. Nay, that will not suffice. I shall hound him out of the country.

STULTZ (*quietly*). Gently, my worthy friend ! The noble structure we have reared will not become uninhabitable because a single swallow has nested beneath its eaves—  
—or perhaps merely alighted before it flies on. The Father was dangerous—this youngster has little strength for mischief. A word will be enough—ay, more likely, a kindly hint.

VAUTIER. Word, or hint—the heretic moves on.

STULTZ. Well, let the day pass happily. Time enough to broach it later. I shall call on Aurèle to-morrow.

ANKER. I agree with Stultz. I said a word of advice would remove the error. Leave our friend to speak it.

VAUTIER. As you wish ; but he goes. There is no room in Neuchâtel for mockers.

STULTZ (*turning*). Ah, here is your good wife, and the dear old mother ! They come opportunely. Doubts and troubles should be ward off the young and the aged.

## THE SMITHY

*(Vautier's wife and mother enter from the inner rooms at rear ; the latter being supported and assisted by Madame Vautier. Mère Vautier is an old woman of ninety, wrinkled, bent, and feeble. She moves only when assisted, and is never separated from the crutch she uses. Voice, sight, and hearing are partially gone ; and her mind has swung back to the past, and is almost oblivious of the present. Her white cap is spotless ; her dress of the best.*

MDME. VAUTIER (*encouragingly*). Quietly, Mother, quietly ; there is no hurry. We have not very far to go. Your own chair is all ready. Halt a moment and rest. The gentlemen will not mind.

*(They halt.)*

MÈRE VAUTIER. Eh, gentlemen ! Did you say gentlemen were present ?

MDME VAUTIER. Only Pastor Anker, and the good Doctor !

MÈRE VAUTIER. It is my duty, child, to receive them. I am glad I am dressed (*with a feeble action of courtesy*). Herr Pastor ! Herr Doctor ! I am pleased to receive you in my house. I accept it as a great kindness.

## THE SMITHY

(*Anker and Stultz bow.*)

(*To Mme. Vautier*) Child, we will move on.

VAUTIER (*crossing towards her*). Take my arm, little mother ; take my arm ! Why, how bonny and bright you are looking ! You were never more dainty. Your friends are always anxious to see you. They are quite pleased with your gracious reception. Easy, little mother ! We shall soon be there.

MÈRE VAUTIER (*with sudden intentness*). Ah, that is Louis' voice—my brave boy Louis ! I can always hear Louis' voice. The others seem to fade away and die into whispers. They do not speak like Louis.

VAUTIER. You are not tired *petite mère* ?

MÈRE VAUTIER. Eh, tired (*chuckling*) ! Tired, when I am walking beside my big-limbed boy ? They must be good walkers to keep pace with him.

VAUTIER. They need to be, Mother. Only a little way farther. Just a few more paces, and we are there.

(*They move slowly towards chair on right.*)

MÈRE VAUTIER (*muttering*). Yes, none are like Louis ; none so strong as Louis—my own son Louis.



## THE SMITHY

VAUTIER (*assisting her to be seated*). Here we are at last, as fresh as before our walk! Why, you are growing brisker and better every day! Is the chair comfortable? I shall wheel it more into the warmth. See, they have not forgotten you, Mother! They have decked it with myrtle.

MÈRE VAUTIER. Myrtle! Why have they arrayed it in myrtle? Myrtle is only for brides. They decked it once for me; but that was a long time ago—a long time ago. 'Twill be cypress next.

MDME. VAUTIER. There is to be a betrothal to-day. Look! the room is all decorated! That is why the myrtle is here. It is Brenda's betrothal—your granddaughter Brenda.

MÈRE VAUTIER. Ah, yes; I remember. Some one told me; but I had forgotten. Things will not stay, they glide away. And the young girl's name?

MDME. VAUTIER. Brenda—my daughter Brenda.

MÈRE VAUTIER (*musings*). Brenda! Brenda! Ah, she must be a fine lass, a noble lass, to wed my brave son Louis. But she must be careful—the boy has his father's spirit. Louis was always wilful. I never could break him.

MDME. VAUTIER (*annoyed, to Vautier*). I cannot

## THE SMITHY

make her understand. She only thinks of you. As for me, I have passed out of her existence. She is sinking more and more into the past. You are her one thought. And she dreams of you as a boy—no older than a boy.

MÈRE VAUTIER (*muttering*). No, I could never break him.

VAUTIER. Let her dream, wife, if the dream be pleasant. She is already asleep (*kissing her lightly*). Happy dreams, little mother !

(*Madame Vautier retires through left ; Stultz crosses to the right, and stands watching Mère Vautier.*)

VAUTIER (*looking up*). You can do nothing, Doctor ?

STULTZ. Nothing, friend Vautier. After all, how little can one ever do ! Birth, infancy, youth, maturity, and death ! Such is the common round of life, and the happiest glide unconsciously from one stage to the other. Only a fool would tamper.

(*The sound of singing is heard in the distance.*)

But listen ! the betrothal song. If

## THE SMITHY

one life is withering, another is flowering.  
If we cannot prevent the one, we may  
assist the other.

VAUTIER. 'Tis the lads and lasses approaching.  
Excuse me, Pastor ! Excuse me, Doctor !  
I must see the wife is prepared. These  
events put the women into a flutter.  
Something is sure to be forgotten. I  
shall take a final look round.

*(He retires through left.)*

STULTZ *(to Anker)*. I hope one thing will be  
forgotten—the news you brought about  
Aurèle. You might have broached it at  
a better time.

ANKER. Oh, Vautier will be guided by me.  
The matter may end with a reproof.  
Vautier is too earnest a son of the Church  
to allow such a momentary falling away.  
Knowing that, I did not express all I  
thought. How could Aurèle be so im-  
prudent ? An Anabaptist—the son of  
an Anabaptist—one might as well har-  
bour Antichrist.

STULTZ. A dying one, Pastor. May we not be  
merciful ? Well, I hope the episode will  
be forgotten. But I know this earnest-  
ness of our friend Vautier. Sometimes  
it runs to stubborn doggedness ; if

## THE SMITHY

crossed, sometimes to unrelenting harshness. There is little forgiveness in the man, who is absolutely convinced that *his* is the only path to Heaven. 'Tis the stumbling wayfarer who is most tolerant.

*(Vautier re-enters with his wife and Steffan.)*

VAUTIER. They are coming up the roadway. Throw open the door, Steffan! Now, Doctor, you will see that all our festivities have not passed away. I promise you a betrothal with all the old customs.

*(Steffan throws open the main door at rear, and a group of young men and girls, laughing and conversing, enter. They are all dressed in holiday attire, and carry flowers and green boughs.*

*After their entrance, Steffan closes the door.)*

VAUTIER. You are welcome, friends, welcome! My house is at your service. Your singing announced your coming. Bring you good news?

A YOUNG MAN. *One* may bear that, Monsieur Vautier. There is no need of so many. We bring more than good news.

## THE SMITHY

VAUTIER. More than good news! Then bring  
you good luck?

THE YOUNG MAN. We bring more than good luck.

VAUTIER. More than good news and good luck!  
Then you must be heralds of happiness.

THE YOUNG MAN. More than happiness, Monsieur  
Vautier. We are the heralds of Love.

VAUTIER. And how know you Love, my friend,  
that you offer it so generously?

THE YOUNG MAN. By the sign it has borne for  
ages—white ribbons, and a young fir  
tree. 'Tis a sign there is no mistaking.  
The lad who carries it offers a challenge,  
and the lasses know its meaning. If  
parted with, it signifies a love pledge.  
And we have found one wandering, and  
bearing the emblem—Aurèle—our friend  
Aurèle. So to you have we brought  
him. Is not Love above happiness  
better than good luck? The fir tree  
shall be planted here.

*(He sings)*

“For a lover is coming, a lover is  
coming,

Hitherward wending, his choice  
now to make.

A lover is coming, a lover is coming,  
Burning and blushing for some  
maiden's sake.”

## THE SMITHY

*(The group of young people take up the betrothal song.)*

“So bring we sweet briar, torn from  
the hedge row,  
Sweet briar, self-sown, which per-  
fumes the air.  
For love springs as freely, and  
blossoms as sweetly,  
Yet whose was the hand that  
planted it there ?

And bring we the woodbine, which  
clings to the homestead,  
Frail woodbine, which thrives,  
though ordered and bound.  
For love once accepted, abandons its  
wildness,  
And faithfully clings to the home  
it has found.

And bring we green myrtle whose  
leaves never alter,  
Green myrtle which heeds not the  
months as they die.  
Like it, may all Love be steadfast,  
unchanging,  
And green, ever green, as the  
years swiftly fly.

## THE SMITHY

For a lover is coming, a lover is  
coming,

Hitherward wending, his choice  
now to make.

A lover is coming, a lover is coming,  
Burning and blushing for some  
maiden's sake."

VAUTIER. You bring sweet briar, woodbine and  
myrtle in profusion, my friends—I can  
see for myself—and the house is pre-  
pared. But the lover you promise? I  
do not see him.

THE YOUNG MAN. Love is bashful, Monsieur Vautier,  
and enters not unceremoniously (*point-  
ing to the closed door at rear*). And you  
have prevented him from entering.

VAUTIER. But Love laughs at locks.

THE YOUNG MAN. Hush! Some one is knocking.

(*A faint knocking is heard.*)

VAUTIER (*laughing*). Then Love must be weak.

(*The knocking grows louder.*)

Ah, it is growing stronger. Open the  
door, Steffan; open the door, and admit  
the stranger!

(*Steffan throws open the main door, and  
Aurèle is seen standing in the doorway,*

## THE SMITHY

*holding in his hands a small fir tree, with white ribbon streamers. He is a young man about twenty-six—the figure upright and apparently well knit—in appearance, frank and attractive. The face, far from being weak, bespeaks a certain resoluteness of character. His hair is markedly fair.)*

THE GROUP (*enthusiastically*). Aurèle ! Aurèle  
Felder !

AURÈLE. May I come in ? Am I permitted ?

VAUTIER. When you promise happiness and good fortune ! 'Twould be churlish to deny you. Do not stand on the threshold ! Come in, Aurèle ! Come in with your offering !

STULTZ. A young man could have no better passport. What say you, young lasses ?

ANKER (*lightly*). They are silent, for lack of words. My dear Doctor, you should feel their pulses. *There* you would find an answer.

STULTZ. Ah, my patients are always too young, or too old. Love is the best tonic in the world.

AURÈLE (*advancing*). Monsieur Vautier, Herr Pastor, Dear Doctor, I crave your courtesy. When a man's hands are free he can defend himself. But bur-



## THE SMITHY

dened as I am, I am helpless. Will no one assist me to freedom ?

VAUTIER. The gift is your own, my son, to bestow as you will.

STULTZ. Nay, nay, friend Vautier ! If the old customs are to be followed, Aurèle has done enough. He carries Love's emblem. Every maid has the right to demand it. 'Tis for the lad to choose.

ANKER. Stultz is right. But I shall see Aurèle is protected. No rush now, young girls ; no wild hurry ! Everything decently and in order. One at a time.

*(The girls tittering hold back.)*

BETTA *(pushing Angelica forward)*. Angelica loves change, so she says. Now's her chance ! Let her try first.

ANGELICA *(drawing back)*. No, no ! He might offer it to me—and then what would Karl say ?

A VOICE. Catch Aurèle poaching ! He is too honest for that.

GRETCHEN. Why not Betta ? I am sure she is the oldest.

THE GROUP. Yes, Betta ; Betta first ! You are the oldest ; go try your luck !

*(They push her unwillingly forward.)*

## THE SMITHY

STULTZ. Goodness ! Do not be frightened ; he will not bite you, girl. Seize your opportunity !

BETTA (*bashfully, to Aurèle*). You—you——

ANGELICA. Speak up, Betta, or he will think you shy !

BETTA. You—you—carry a young fir-tree, fair Sir !

AURÈLE. 'Tis my heart and my love, sweet maid. If I give, one must ask.

BETTA. May I—may I claim it, young Sir ?

AURÈLE. Ah, your robe is green, and my ribbons are white. My gift, dear maid, is not for you.

THE GROUP. Now Gretchen—Gretchen next !

GRETCHEN (*moving forward*). Maybe then, Aurèle, your fir tree is for me ?

AURÈLE. Ah, Gretchen, 'tis hard to refuse. But your eyes are blue—blue as the lake—and my ribbons are white.

ANGELICA (*pushed forward*). At least my skin is white (*undoing her kerchief*). See ! white as the lake's foam. The tree must be for me.

AURÈLE. But your lips are red, red as two cherries. You must look for red ribbons. My gift I retain.

THE GROUP. Karl will find you them, Angelica—some day—some day.

## THE SMITHY

THE GIRLS (*speaking together*). Is it for me? Is it for me?

AURÈLE (*surveying them and shaking his head*).

My heart is still my own. I do not part with it. But grieve not! If there are many young maidens, there are many young fir trees—out yonder—(*indicating the young men*) and no lack of hands to gather them.

STULTZ (*jestingly*). Gramercy! Now I know what it means to be old and respected. Ah, if my hands were not so stiff and no longer supple, I should be amongst the young saplings. Ah, Aurèle! one is coming at last who will ease you of your offering.

*(Brenda enters from rear accompanied by her mother. The group of friends fall back on either side and leave a passage, down which Brenda advances to the centre. As she passes flowers are thrown down before her, and she is saluted with cries of "Good luck and happiness! Good luck and happiness.")*

BRENDA (*to Aurèle who has moved to the centre*).

Ah, love! you have come!

AURÈLE. Yes, dearest! I have come.

## THE SMITHY

BRENDA. And bringing a fir tree ! Tell me ! Is the gift for thy own true love ?

AURÈLE. For my own true love, my true love only. And for whom but thou ? For thy soul is as pure as the snow on the hills ; so my ribbons are white. See ! nothing but white, white and spotless as thou ! Take it, dear heart ; it was gathered for thee. *(He places the small fir upon the centre table, amidst the clapping and rejoicing of the company.)*

BRENDA. May God, for thy sake, Aurèle, keep me so !

AURÈLE. It is I who need assistance. May He make me, dearest, worthy of your sweet self !

STULTZ *(rubbing his hands)*. Then, Aurèle, you will need to be perfect. Herr Pastor ! The duty is now yours.

ANKER. And a pleasant one.

*(He takes up his position behind the small table, Aurèle and Brenda standing on each side.)*

ANKER. My children ! You understand the nature of my office, and the ceremony we are about to enter upon ? If not, pause and think. These festivities, these flowers, are—well, harmless in their

## THE SMITHY

place. But a betrothal is more than feasting, more than merriment and scattered flowers. Some hold it lightly ; and treat a pledge—given, if ever pledge were given, in perfect honesty—as an idle whisper of the lips ; to be forgotten or put aside by a newer fancy. Small wonder that when such vows are held so lightly, others also are discarded. With us, the ceremony is otherwise. 'Tis a faithful dedication, a preparation for a more sacred union. Once entered upon there is no return. The troth is only broken with shame—with shame, and loss of honour. Think, therefore ! Without love the pledge would be meaningless. (*to Aurèle*) Dost thou truly love this maid, my son ?

AURÈLE. With my whole heart, Herr Pastor, honestly and loyally.

ANKER (*to Brenda*). And thou, daughter ?

BRENDA. I have only one thought, one hope—Aurèle. I live only for Aurèle.

ANKER. It is enough. Then plight your troth.

AURÈLE (*taking a ring attached to one of the white ribbons*). Your hand, dearest !

*(Brenda gives him her left hand.)*

In the presence of all near to us I,

## THE SMITHY

Aurèle Felder, desirous later of claiming thee as my wife, plight thee my troth.

*(He places the ring upon her third finger.)*

BRENDA *(taking a second ring attached to a white streamer)*. And I, Brenda Vautier, in th : hope that God may give me thee as a husband, plight thee also my troth.

*(She places the ring upon the hand of Aurèle.)*

ANKER *(cutting the ribbons connected with the two rings)*. We all are witnesses. May your hopes be consummated, and no separation other than this.

AURÈLE *(raising Brenda's hand)*. My own true love !

*(The group of young people take up the betrothal song altered to meet the occasion ; and at the end of each verse fling down woodbine, sweet briar and myrtle before the betrothed pair.)*

“ For a lover has come, a lover has come,

We question no longer, the choice he will make.

For a lover has come, a lover has come.

## THE SMITHY

Burning and blushing for this  
maiden's sake."

So bring we sweet briar, torn from  
the hedge row,

Sweet briar, self sown, which per-  
fumes the air, etc., etc.

STULTZ.      Excellently rendered, my young  
friends ; excellently rendered. I am  
delighted the old customs are not quite  
forgotten. But song is only one means  
of voicing our joy. There is movement  
also. Give us the old dance of the  
Canton—the bridal dance.

THE GIRLS (*enthusiastically*). Yes, yes ! the old  
dance, the bridal dance.

STULTZ (*to M<sup>d</sup>me. Vautier*). Old as I am, I  
would tread the measure again, if  
Madame should deign to honour me.

MDME. VAUTIER (*smiling*). Ah, Doctor, the years  
have touched you, but yet only lightly.  
You are spare and active. As for me !  
(*with a shrug*) Well, you see, the years  
weigh more heavily.

STULTZ.      And I must suffer ?

MDME. VAUTIER. Tush ! I am saving you from  
your own recklessness. We should only  
hamper them. Youth moves more  
freely with youth.

## THE SMITHY

STULTZ. You are right.

MDME. VAUTIER. Let us stand aside and watch.

STULTZ. Ay! Old age must also be taught its place. And its place is to stand aside and watch.

*(They move to the right. Vautier and Anker at the same time crossing to the left in conversation. The young girls and men in the meanwhile, having selected their respective partners, begin an old country dance, in which Aurèle and Brenda are the central figures.)*

VAUTIER *(waiting for its conclusion)*. Now 'tis time for the host to assert himself. In the inner room is wine, and a feast of dainties prepared by the wife and Brenda. *(to Mme. Vautier)* Marie, you must tempt Doctor Stultz! *(to Anker)* Herr Pastor, they will need your blessing. Excuse me for the moment. I shall look to the little mother—and follow later.

ANGELICA. Then, Brenda—Aurèle! Give us the lovers' bridge.

AURÈLE. We will. You all must pass under.

ANGELICA. Come, Karl! First, for the greatest good luck.

*(Brenda and Aurèle take up a position in front of doorway on left, raising their*



## THE SMITHY

*right and left hands respectively to form an arch. Under this the rest of the Company pass in couples and leave the stage.)*

VAUTIER (*moving towards the chair where Mère Vautier is still dozing*). Still sleeping ! You must awake, little mother, or you will lose all the festivities. If you wish, I will take you in for a little while.

MÈRE VAUTIER (*vacantly*). Eh ! Some one is speaking. Is it you, Louis ? Is it you ?

VAUTIER. It is I, Mother.

MÈRE VAUTIER. Ah, give me your hand, my son. In the half darkness I cannot see you. To feel it gives me courage.

VAUTIER (*gently taking her hand*). You are not frightened ? Nothing has frightened you ?

MÈRE VAUTIER. Not frightened, Louis ! not frightened ! But the world seems so empty and large. One can lose oneself so easily. It is good to have a guide.

VAUTIER. Mother, you have always me.

MÈRE VAUTIER. Yes, always, Louis ; my brave boy Louis. I must have been dozing and dreaming. For your father, Louis, my own good man, was talking to me. We often speak to each other now. We were talking of many things—of the new gown he is going to buy me—of the

## THE SMITHY

vines he will plant in the Spring ; but chiefly of you. We always talk of you. I know not who is the prouder—my man, or I.

VAUTIER. To listen to you, Mother, I sometimes wonder if I am your son. I, so big and strong ; you, so frail and small.

MÈRE VAUTIER. But your Father, Louis—my own man—he was not frail or small. There was not a nobler in the country. How brave and handsome he carried himself. When he chose me from all the maidens for his betrothed, there were many who would gladly have changed places with me.

VAUTIER. Or with Father, I'll warrant !

MÈRE VAUTIER. May be, Louis, may be ! But there are no betrothal ceremonies now, like in olden times. Old ways, like old people, are fast dying out.

VAUTIER. Well, to-day we missed none. Not a single custom was omitted (*assisting Mère Vautier to rise*). Rest on me, Mother ! Ah, *that* is good. There were garlands, the young lover with his favours, the betrothal songs, and the bridal dance. They are only waiting for us now, little mother, to drink to Brenda's happiness.

## THE SMITHY

MÈRE VAUTIER (*vaguely*). Brenda, Brenda! Ah, yes, I remember now; I had forgotten.

VAUTIER. And look! The room is bright with decorations. All done by Brenda's companions. See, Mother, *here* is the lover's gift (*showing the fir tree*); and around it are the sprays of flowers they flung to her.

MÈRE VAUTIER. Yes, I know. Myrtle for constancy.

VAUTIER (*handing her a spray*). Here is some.

MÈRE VAUTIER. And woodbine, and sweet briar!

VAUTIER. Both are here.

MÈRE VAUTIER. And the bunch of rosemary for true happiness! Give me the rosemary, that I may smell it once more! It brought me happiness, though my man has gone before me—gone, so many years ago.

VAUTIER (*searching*). Rosemary, a bunch of rosemary! I do not see it, Mother. I am sure there was none.

MÈRE VAUTIER. No rosemary! I thought you had kept all the old customs. To be betrothed without rosemary means troubles and sorrows. Time brings enough without making more. You must find it, Louis, or some misery will follow.

VAUTIER. There is no bunch, or it would be here.

## THE SMITHY

MÈRE VAUTIER. You *must* find it. You *must* find it.

VAUTIER. There is none. It has been overlooked. But what does it signify? Life is something more than flowers and garlands. Let us join our friends!

MÈRE VAUTIER. No rosemary! A betrothal without rosemary! The child starts badly. They should have remembered.

STULTZ (*appearing at left doorway*). They are calling for you, my friend, to propose Brenda's good fortune, and to welcome the dear mother.

VAUTIER. I am coming, Stultz. Let them fill their glasses. We must drink to their good fortune and happiness.

CURTAIN.

END OF ACT I.

## ACT II

The smithy attached to the house of Louis Vautier. A wooden balcony, which leads to the upper rooms of the dwelling-house, runs across the rear wall, connecting by means of a staircase with the floor of the forge. An entrance is also obtained to the living apartments through a door on the left. The third door, on the right close to the rear wall, abuts on to the public street. It alone is open. On the same side, between it and the front, is a low window—beneath it, a heavy working bench. Towards the centre of the stage is the forge ; and close to it a large iron anvil. Built in the left wall is another fireplace constructed of stone. A fire is burning on each. The floor throughout is of rough stone work. Various tools are scattered about.

The time is towards evening.

## THE SMITHY

*(As the curtain rises Vautier and Steffan are seen busily engaged in beating into shape upon the anvil a bar of red hot metal. Vautier is wielding the hammer, whilst Steffan holds the bar with iron pincers.)*

VAUTIER. Steady, lad, steady! A little more forward. That will do. Keep a firm grip!

STEFFAN. Ay, Master.

*(The Smith continues his work.)*

VAUTIER *(resting)*. No more for the present. 'Tis cooling too rapidly. It can scarcely have been heated enough. Let it go back to the forge, and give it a good firing.

STEFFAN. Very well, Master.

*(Steffan replaces the iron in the forge and busies himself in reheating it. Vautier in the meantime stands lost in thought, his hammer resting upon the anvil.)*

VAUTIER *(to himself, in an angry undertone)*. I thought him a fool; I should have judged him a knave. Fools do not make renegades. And not a week has passed since the betrothal took place. 'Twas I that played the fool—I, Louis

## THE SMITHY

Vautier—and not Aurèle Felder. If I had only spoken then, and taxed him with his sin, there would have been no betrothal; but I listened to Anker and Stultz. A word would be sufficient, so they said, to show him the error of his ways, and send the heretic off. (*With a hard laugh.*) Well, the word has been spoken; and flung back. Ay, flung back! Fool that I was to listen. There would then have been no flowers or garlands. The lout should have gone packing.

STEFFAN (*from forge*). The iron is hot enough now.

VAUTIER. Hot enough! It cannot be. Fan the furnace up more! We are not beating plough shares. I want it glowing, hissing—at white heat.

STEFFAN. Ah, Master.

VAUTIER (*muttering*). If iron can be beaten and shaped, why not other things? We shall see, we shall see. A betrothal is not a wedding; and no child of mine shall lose her soul because of a piece of mere merrymaking. If he think so, he is mistaken. Aurèle Felder blackens these doors no more.

STEFFAN (*ceasing to blow*). 'Tis waste of time

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to work longer. The iron is at white heat.

VAUTIER. Well, get the pincers ; and look sharp !

*(Steffan removes the heated bar to anvil.)*

VAUTIER. Run it beyond the anvil—about a foot ! We shall use the clamps.

*(Steffan places the bar so that a portion extends beyond the anvil, and Vautier rapidly fixes it firmly with iron clamps. A few strokes with the hammer are sufficient to bend it at right angles.)*

VAUTIER *(flinging down the hammer)*. That will do. We have now the three pair. Tomorrow, Steffan, see that they are delivered ! They have my word that they should be ready.

STEFFAN. I shall take them before breakfast.

VAUTIER. Good ! I have rarely need to repeat my orders. There is another matter. Have you seen Felder recently ?

STEFFAN. You mean Aurèle ?

VAUTIER. I said Felder. We will drop the Aurèle.

STEFFAN *(surprised)*. Not since the betrothal, Master.

VAUTIER *(fiercely)*. The betrothal ! Curse the betrothal ! Well, in future you will



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do well to avoid him. You heed my words ! And as far as this house is concerned, he does not enter its doors. If I am absent, the duty falls on you. Under no pretext—you understand ? You will be wise to remember my wish.

STEFFAN. Aurèle, not enter ! Brenda's lover ! Surely, Master, there is some mistake.

VAUTIER (*angrily*). Is the house mine or yours ? Who is master—you or I ? If I chose to say yes or no, what is it to you ? I make no mistakes ; at least, no longer.

STEFFAN. But Brenda—your daughter Brenda !

VAUTIER. Am I called upon to discuss my conduct ? Your duty is obedience. 'Tis sufficient that it is my wish. Under no circumstance whatever does Felder enter this house—to see me—to see my daughter—or any other soul. My order is plain. Do you take care that there is no need of repetition. Give me my coat !

(*Steffan hands it, whilst Vautier removes his leather apron.*)

I shall leave the new pike-head and the two swords at the Civic Chambers. Do *you* get on with the repairing of the lock for the Church gates !

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STEFFAN. As you wish, Master.

*(Vautier gathers up the swords and pike-head, and retires through doorway on right.)*

STEFFAN *(musing)*. So Aurèle is forbidden the house ! I wonder why ! Whatever can be the cause ? Tush, it cannot be for long. He *must* come back—for Brenda's sake.

*(Brenda appears on balcony, having entered from one of the inner rooms.)*

BRENDA *(in a low voice)*. Are you alone ?

STEFFAN *(glancing up)*. Yes, alone ; quite alone.

BRENDA. I want to speak to you, Steffan. I have been waiting, oh so anxiously, to see you. Has father gone ?

STEFFAN. Only a minute ago. I cannot say when he will return.

BRENDA. Then it must be now. *(She descends to the forge.)* Oh, Steffan ! Something terrible has happened. It seems all like some fearful dream ; too fearful to be true. But it is no dream. This is the forge—the daylight is streaming in—I am speaking to you—I am awake.

STEFFAN. Yes, Brenda, it is daytime. You

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are speaking to me—to me, Steffan.  
It is no dream.

BRENDA. Only this morning I heard it. And only a week of happiness! My heart is too numb to weep. They are parting me from Aurèle—from Aurèle, my betrothed. Why could they not leave us happy?

STEFFAN. I also have only just heard it. Aurèle is forbidden the house.

BRENDA. You have heard? Then you will help us. I must see him again. He is mine; why should I be denied? You will help me, Steffan?

STEFFAN. He threatened me—your father I mean—if I admitted Aurèle—if I even spoke to him. What, Brenda, can I do?

BRENDA. Oh, it is all so unjust, so cruel! Has not every one the right to fight against injustice? You promised once to prove more than friend. Now, you will not draw back?

STEFFAN. I would do anything for you—go anywhere for you, Brenda, if you command. But tell me the cause of all this unhappiness. Then, I may do something. At present, I know nothing, only that the door is shut.

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BRENDA. How can I tell you best ? You have heard of Tancrède Masson—the friend who has been living with Aurèle ?

STEFFAN. I have seen him—a quiet, sickly one, with a dry, gasping cough. He comes from Zurich, they say.

BRENDA. Yes, they drove him out, because his father is a wicked man—an Anabaptist. He was very ill, and the poor fellow had nowhere to go. He knew Aurèle as a school boy, and came to him. And Aurèle took him in out of kindness ; for he only begged for a shelter, and a roof to die under.

STEFFAN. He seemed a gentle, harmless creature.

BRENDA. Aurèle says, as gentle and kindly as a girl. He would not harm a child. So it seems, as if even Death were loth to strike, and its shadow fell lovingly.

STEFFAN. But what has all this to do with your trouble ? Men do not quarrel over an act of kindness. To grant him shelter was only charity.

BRENDA. One would think so ; yet somehow it is a crime. Kindness and charity may be construed as wickedness, if they run counter to the ideas of others. That is why it is so unjust, so cruel. To Aurèle, it all seemed so natural. A

## THE SMITHY

human being was sinking, and he held out a hand.

STEFFAN. I should think less of him had he refused.

BRENDA. But the misfortune is, he is an Anabaptist, or the son of an Anabaptist. I do not know exactly why they are a wicked people ; it happened years ago when I was a little child. But Mother says there were then many of them—that they fell away from our religion, and sought to live according to their own. There were terrible scenes. Churches were burnt down, and thousands were ruined. They were only crushed out by the sword and fire.

STEFFAN. I know the history. But *then* they were powerful. What harm can this poor fellow do ?

BRENDA. Harm ! He has already parted me from Aurèle. And yet—it may be a sin—still, to see him every day, knowing he has turned the poor fellow adrift—Steffan, I would not have *that*. And that is what Father insisted upon. He nurses some bitterness against old François Masson, and will have no dealings with his heretic son. So an act of charity has separated us.

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STEFFAN. And Aurèle ! Aurèle would not yield ?

BRENDA. Aurèle ! Aurèle still houses his brother's old blind dog. Do you think he would refuse the like to a weak, dying man ?

STEFFAN. I do not, Brenda. But listen ! Do you hear nothing ?

BRENDA (*listening*). No, nothing. Only the creaking of a cart coming up the road.

STEFFAN. I thought I heard footsteps on the gravel. I shall look. (*He moves to door on right.*) No, there is no one. I must have been mistaken. But what can I do ? Your Father would not listen to me.

BRENDA. Would Father listen to any one except he agreed with him ? Steffan, I *must* see Aurèle. They have given him to me in betrothal, and what are their old quarrels to my love or me ? I have other duties as well as to my Father. Aurèle is to be my husband.

STEFFAN. You mean, I am to go to him !

BRENDA. No, no. He is sure to come. How could he remain away ? When he comes you will help me to see him. If 'tis only to tell him I still love him. He

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will look for you. There can be no wrong, at least in that.

STEFFAN. Wrong or no, you may trust me. I care more for your wishes than your Father's threats. Do not trouble, Brenda! When Aurèle comes, you shall know.

BRENDA (*resting a hand upon his arm*). Thank you, Steffan! I shall not trouble. I do not think a woman could be more honoured than I.

(*Dr. Stultz enters through door on left.*)

STULTZ. Ah, Brenda herself! The very person I desired to see. Now do not treat me as an intruder. I do not ask from idle curiosity. Is it peace or war?

BRENDA. Dear old Doctor! I cannot greet you with a smile to-day. I would, but my heart is heavy.

STULTZ. Eh, no smile! Well, do not offer one, my dear child. My greetings do not always produce them. They are often absent. (*Taking her hand.*) And the heavy heart, little one! You must strive to be patient and brave.

BRENDA. You have heard how unjust they are to Aurèle? Doctor, you will befriend him? You know how good he is.

STULTZ. Yes, yes, I have heard. The good

## THE SMITHY

Mother has just broken the sad news. And I am very troubled, very troubled for him and for you. Sympathy! Ay, my daughter, a heart-full. But my excuse to speak to you is not merely to extend sympathy—sympathy often retards more illnesses than it heals—but to advise. That is why I put my question. Is it peace or war?

BRENDA. Peace or War! I do not understand.

STULTZ. Then I must be plainer. Your Mother has acquainted me with the quarrel between your father and Aurèle—of the angry parting—and the stoppage of all visits. Well, if the issue only concerned those two, the question would be simple. Time might gradually soften their anger. But there are other relationships, and they complicate the matter. Will *they* rest quietly and leave the healing to Time?

BRENDA. There are some griefs Time never heals; the pain is only deadened.

STULTZ. Bless me! So young and already philosophising. You are developing more rapidly than I thought. I need not press for an answer to my question. When a woman begins to think there is mischief afloat.



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BRENDA. A woman only thinks when she is wronged. And to part me and Aurèle is a wrong—a cruel wrong. We belong each to the other. At first Love only spoke—the desire for the touch of his hand. But now, 'tis become a cry for justice—for justice to him, and to me.

STULTZ. Justice, my girl! I am afraid your father only recognises and tolerates obedience. Père Vautier is a strict disciplinarian.

BRENDA. Would you rest quietly, if you were I? Dear Doctor, say! Would you not cling to your love?

STULTZ. If I were as young as you, no doubt I would rebel; and do that, and many other foolish things, just like our friend Steffan.

STEFFAN. I would do anything for Brenda's happiness.

STULTZ. I do not doubt it. Still, it may not follow from your willingness.

*(Steffan moves across to work bench on right, and busies himself with repairs to a heavy lock.)*

STULTZ *(to Brenda)*. No, my dear! Even my advice in those youthful years was of small value. Take rather the counsel

## THE SMITHY

of one so very many years older, and perhaps a little wiser.

BRENDA. Must I not see him, my betrothed ? It is unjust—a cruel wrong.

STULTZ. True, Brenda ! Still, this world of ours is full of injustice and cruel wrongs. You are too young to understand them all ; but you will, some day. And you will find that they are rarely removed by reckless heroism ; but invariably by patience and the humblest of means. I do not ask you for much—I do not want you to put away your love—no, neither to forget. I ask but a little patience. Ah yes, my dear, I know how much I sue for ! To the young, patience of all the virtues is hardest to acquire.

BRENDA. Patience ! 'Tis so easy to be patient when the mind is content. But when every heart-beat is full of desire, there is no room for patience. Dear Doctor, you cannot stop its beating.

STULTZ. Nor would I wish to. Give me your hand, my child ! (*He takes her hand.*) I only seek to quiet its throbbing. And there is one appeal which will reach home—the welfare of Aurèle—the saving of your beloved. With patience we

## THE SMITHY

may hope for the best. Your father may soften ; I may remove the friction ; or even, the poor sickly youth may pass. With patience you may regain everything. But a little reckless foolishness may produce a greater ruin.

BRENDA. What could be greater ? The worst has come.

STULTZ. No, no. For Aurèle's sake listen to me, my girl. To you, this question of harbouring the lad seems a mere trifle. You are ignorant of the fierce hatred to which his creed gave birth—of the bitterness it engendered—of the cruelties committed against, and in its name. They only sleep now, because the heresy is crushed. A whisper, and the old passions would awake again. Aurèle would be banned, cut off from the Church. No man would employ him, and none purchase his labour.

BRENDA. Oh, they cannot ; they dare not ! The Pastor would interfere.

STULTZ. Yes, he would interfere. But not to hinder ; more likely to hound them on. And all in the name of Right and Justice. Faugh ! Justice and Right, as understood by the many, are answerable

## THE SMITHY

for more injustice than the world ever dreams of.

BRENDA. I will be patient ; I will be patient, Doctor, for Aurèle's sake !

STULTZ. So the heart-beats are already growing steadier. Be wise, little woman, and we shall yet hear the wedding bells.

BRENDA (*forcing a smile*). You have brought the smile, dear old Doctor, which I denied you at first.

STULTZ (*kissing her forehead*). 'Twill be a brighter one, my child, when the clouds blow away. Now, let us go to the dear Mother. She also has her griefs.

(*They retire through rear.*)

STEFFAN (*examining the lock, which in the meantime he has overhauled*). The lock should work now, with plenty of oiling. The rust must have been eating its way for years. (*He applies oil, and then tries the lock with a key.*) 'Twill run easier in an hour or so. (*Listening.*) But there is a click somewhere. The new bolt must want filing. (*He raises his head suddenly, and glances towards the door on right.*) Ah, I am certain I heard a step outside. Père Vautier is returning sooner than he expected. The

## THE SMITHY

Chambers must have been closed. (*He again gives his attention to the lock. Meanwhile the door on right is half opened carefully, disclosing Aurèle.*)

AURÈLE (*in a whisper*). Steffan ?

STEFFAN. You, Aurèle ! Why have you come ?

AURÈLE. Where is Brenda ? 'Tis to speak to her.

STEFFAN. Brenda is within, with the others. I dare not bring her out. Vautier may return at any moment. He has only gone to the Civic Chambers. I thought you were he.

AURÈLE (*with a laugh*). Well, I have no desire to meet him. A little of Papa Vautier goes a long way. We have already had one breezy difference. I do not want another.

STEFFAN (*alarmed*). For Heaven's sake come in, and close the door ! Some one may see you. They may have noticed your coming !

AURÈLE. 'Tis not likely. I came across the field in the shadow of the stone wall. I have been hid in the laurels for the last half hour. I was on the point of entering before, and heard voices. I glanced through the window, but could distinguish nothing.

## THE SMITHY

STEFFAN. It must have been Brenda and the Doctor. I heard a step on the gravel. It must have been you.

AURÈLE. Very possibly ! Then I could just detect you at the bench. I tried three or four times to attract your attention, but you were too occupied. Then I risked it, and opened the door. (*Lightly.*) In truth, Steffan, I entered much more bravely a week ago despite of being pranked as a lover.

STEFFAN. Don't treat it lightly ! You do not know my Master as well as I do. He is not the man to be crossed.

AURÈLE. Nor am I his apprentice to be ordered. If he thought to frighten me into cutting poor Tancrède adrift, he was mistaken ; and he is equally mistaken if he thinks I am going to give up Brenda. I intend to see her by hook or by crook.

STEFFAN. And much you will gain !

AURÈLE. I shall see her, and *that* is gain enough of itself. Though I know every feature, every movement of her body, every tone of her voice, yet they only serve as a call to her dear self. Don't smile at me, Steffan ! Some day, when your heart is no longer your own, you will understand.

## THE SMITHY

STEFFAN (*restraining himself*). I suppose so, Aurèle. Perhaps I understand now. I am not laughing. God! I could not. I wish this trouble had never arisen.

AURÈLE. Who could have expected it to happen? I thought no more of sheltering Tan-crède than as an ordinary act of humanity. If I had refused they might have murmured.

STEFFAN. Will he go? His departure would be the best for everybody. If some one told him of all the mischief his presence means—if I were to speak—would he not leave?

AURÈLE. Go! Poor Tan-crède would want no pressing. Never a kinder and sweeter soul drew breath. I cannot speak the word and keep my manhood; and if I will not, no other shall.

STEFFAN. And Brenda!

AURÈLE. Ah, Brenda is different. That is why I have come. If Brenda think otherwise, it shall be done. There is no choice between wife and friend. I shall not persuade her, yet I can judge her answer.

STEFFAN. You think she will sacrifice happiness?

AURÈLE. I do not think; I am sure. To speak the word will not gain happiness. Ay,

## THE SMITHY

though all this trouble were swept away—though we were man and wife, and fortune smiled on us. For the thought would be continually present—the thought that it was built on a deed of meanness. The banquet table might always be laden with rich delicacies; but what would be their richness to us? We should ever face each other with a bitter taste upon our tongues. But you must let me see her. You must help me to see her.

STEFFAN. I have promised Brenda, and you shall; but not now. You must wait till it is dark—the evening is fast closing in—all the others will go to their supper. I shall tell her you are here; for a few moments her absence will not be noticed.

AURÈLE. Thanks, Steffan! And how shall I know if I may venture?

STEFFAN (*thinking*). There should be some way. Yes! I will light the candle on the work bench. (*He lights it.*) Do you stay amongst the laurels! If there is no chance, it will burn as it is; if all is safe, I will move it to the end—thus! Hush! there is some one coming now. Go quickly, and trust me! I shall not fail. (*He pushes Aurèle through door on*



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*right and resumes his occupation at bench.)*

*(From the rear enter Madame Vautier and Anna Asper. The latter is cloaked, having driven in to the town. She is a few years younger than Mme. Vautier, but there is little resemblance in the two sisters. Anna Asper is shrewd, confident, business-like and talkative. Mme. Vautier on the other hand, as if crushed by her husband's personality, displays little independence of character.)*

MDME. VAUTIER. Will you not come into the house first, Anna, and remove your things ?

ANNA ASPER. And have to sit down and retail you the tittle-tattle of the last three months ! Time enough when I've finished my errand ; for I can tell you plainly, sister, I did not drive over to gossip, but to see how your husband was getting on with my business.

MDME. VAUTIER. I do not think my husband can be in. Yes, I remember now, Brenda said he had gone down to the town.

ANNA ASPER. Well, *there* is his sturdy stripling of an apprentice tinkering over there. He can inform us.

MDME. VAUTIER. Steffan !

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STEFFAN (*turning*). Yes, Mistress !

MDME. VAUTIER. Is your master about.

STEFFAN. I expect him back every minute. He was to return in half an hour.

ANNA ASPER. Half an hour ! If the man get started on some Church matters, we may cool our feet for hours. But the lad may give me what I want. Do you know if the fire-dogs Vautier was to make for me are ready ?

STEFFAN. There are a pair by the forge he made last week. (*Producing a pair.*) Are these the ones, Madame Asper ?

ANNA ASPER. Ay, those are they. He said they would be firm and strong. Heaven be praised, the logs will not slip from them. Will you put them in the cart before I leave ?

STEFFAN. I shall do so now. (*He retires with the irons to rear.*)

MDME. VAUTIER. And was it for those you drove over from Neuveville—for those and nothing else ?

ANNA ASPER. Ay, sister, I did—for those and nothing else. For the coming Saturday is my good man's birthday.

MDME. VAUTIER. Yes, yours and his run close together. But what has that to do with these fire irons ?

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ANNA ASPER. They are a surprise. For nineteen years, as you know, Marie, I have worked my fingers to make him something for his natal day. The Lord knows how many comforters, night caps, and slippers I have stitched for him. Last year I gave him an embroidered waist-coat. And in the whole nineteen years what do you think he has given me in return? Six brass pots, a set of flat irons, two cuckoo clocks, an iron basin, and a flour dredge. I believe the kitchen is wholly furnished with my birthday presents. I *did* think this year he would have done something for me; for I told him there was no more room for another nail to hang his dishes upon.

MDME. VAUTIER. Ah, last Monday was your birthday! I intended to have sent you something; but all this worry we have had drove it out of my head.

ANNA ASPER. There, do not trouble yourself about *that*, Marie! The years of a woman are carefully noted, just the same as a horse, until a certain time; then both are simply classed as aged. Well, when I reminded him, my good man smiled and said he would go to Berne.

## THE SMITHY

There was so much better choice, he thought, than in Neuchâtel.

MDME. VAUTIER. They say the shops are much finer there.

ANNA ASPER. They may be, or they may not. For what do you think he arrived home with ?

MDME. VAUTIER. Some lace, or some ribbons !

ANNA ASPER. Ribbons or lace, faugh ! With a candlestick—a hideous brass candlestick. “ It would be so useful,” he said. After all, I should be thankful it was not a churn. For he has churns upon his brain. Some seven years ago he bought one wonderfully cheap at Mercier’s farm, and now there is not a sale in the district but the goodman trots to it and comes back with a churn.

MDME. VAUTIER. And you have only ten cows, since the mouse coloured one was sold.

ANNA ASPER. Bless my soul, it would not matter if we had only a goat. We have churns of every description—one-handled, two-handled, large and small. It makes not the slightest difference what I think. “ Dear me, Anna,” he will say, “ why, I only paid two gulden for the article, and it would fetch more if sold to-morrow.” In a few years the

## THE SMITHY

house will be a perfect museum—of churns. So now you see why I want the fire-dogs. Truth, he cannot deny they are useful, for the old ones were always falling over. Three times I have burnt my hands this last week alone ; and yesterday the logs nearly set fire to Chusan, the cat.

MDME. VAUTIER. How is Johann—my brother-in-law ? I do not think I inquired ?

ANNA ASPER. Oh, my goodman ! He is just the same—saving a little sciatica—well and hale.

MDME. VAUTIER. You have a kindly husband, Anna, with all his peculiarities.

ANNA ASPER. Kindly ! I should say so, Marie. *I* made no mistakes when I married. No one ever heard *me* complain of my man. Though sometimes he *will* talk, talk, talk, like the clack, clacking of a mill wheel. But his luck was in when he mated me—and I tell him so often—a patient, quiet, silent sort of woman. Thank the Lord I am not given to cackle. La ! the women who can hold their tongues, and say all they have to say in two or three words, are few and far between.

MDME. VAUTIER. Yes, yes ! We are not many.

## THE SMITHY

ANNA ASPER. For all that, I never murmur.

Bless my heart, I would sooner trust a talkative fellow than a silent one. If the man talks, you know what he is driving at ; but if he mopes and thinks, heaven only knows what mischief he is dreaming of. Ten to one it is either another woman, like with Lacaton, our next-door neighbour ; or he is souring himself with religion, like that giant husband of yours. No, no, the clack clack of the mill wheel is safer.

MDME. VAUTIER. Well, as you have finished your business, sister, will you not come inside and take off your things ?

ANNA ASPER. We may as well stay here until the supper is ready. The room is warmer and the nights are still chilly. I shall take off my cloak (*attempting to unfasten same*). Pish ! these new-fangled fasteners are made on purpose to plague one.

MDME. VAUTIER (*advancing*). Can I help you, Anna ?

ANNA ASPER. No, no, 'tis undone now (*throwing cloak on stool*). There, what think you of my new bodice (*patting it*). Is it not bonny ? I just put it on to greet your eyes with a bit of colour. In this town,

## THE SMITHY

with their rusty blacks, the women are like walking hearses.

MDME. VAUTIER. 'Tis sweetly pretty. Oh ! I would love to have something similar.

ANNA ASPER. And you might, sister, if your husband were not so bent on his religion. Though why the Lord should love ugly colours is beyond my ken. I should credit Him with better taste.

MDME. VAUTIER. It is done to mortify ourselves.

ANNA ASPER. Fiddlesticks ! If you mortify a woman, you only make her spiteful and ill-tempered. Fowls don't get plump on self-denial. Fine table birds they would make ! And small wonder if a woman grows angular and bony. 'Tis only a trick to save a few florins, and you are all silly enough to be taken in. Now, *this* I bought from Peter the Pedlar. I always buy my silks from him. The man knows exactly what I can set off. And he tells me that he dares not carry a piece of silk in his boxes when in Neuchâtel or the authorities would forfeit it. A pretty pass indeed when a woman is to be damned for a bit of colour. Anyhow, I've bought a pretty piece of silk for my godchild Brenda—white and sprinkled

## THE SMITHY

all over with blue sprays of forget-me-nots.

MDME. VAUTIER. The poor child will be pleased.

But have you no need of it, Anna ?

ANNA ASPER. Not the slightest ! Flowered silks do not suit my figure. I want something bolder. And even Vautier can find no fault with the child wearing it on her wedding day.

MDME. VAUTIER. Wedding day ! We shall see no wedding day for many a weary month.

ANNA ASPER. No wedding ! Are you going daft ? Lads and lasses do not rest once they are betrothed.

MDME. VAUTIER. But everything is at an end—the betrothal is broken off—they no longer meet. Aurèle is forbidden the house.

ANNA ASPER. Bless my soul ! What nonsense have you been listening to ? What has the young man been doing ?

MDME. VAUTIER. It all comes of his harbouring that young Anabaptist—that heretic Masson.

ANNA ASPER. Gracious ! I thought it was a wench, nothing but a wench. And so all this fuss is over *that* poor creature ! Oh, I see, this is some more of your husband's Calvinism. Why does not the



## THE SMITHY

man keep to his trade ? 'Twill mortify *him* to get a bit of my mind. What next will the man be meddling with ?

MDME. VAUTIER (*alarmed*). Hush, Anna ! I hear his steps.

ANNA ASPER. Psha ! I am not his wife—thank Heaven—to be frightened.

(*Vautier enters through door on right.*)

VAUTIER. Oh, it's only you ! Good day to you, sister-in-law !

ANNA ASPER. Umph ! And the good day to you, brother-in-law.

VAUTIER. Have you the irons ? I saw to them myself.

ANNA ASPER. Oh, yes, I have them. You are a sensible body when you keep to your tools.

VAUTIER. Eh ! Then you are satisfied ! It is something to satisfy Anna Asper.

ANNA ASPER. I said so long as you kept to your tools. But when you go a-meddling with doctrines and Church matters, the Lord only knows what troubles you brew ! There is Marie wringing her hands—the lass a-weeping—and the young lad miserable and heart-broken, I've no doubt, when they all might be happy and merry, if you only kept to your work.

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VAUTIER (*ignoring her, to Mme. Vautier*).

Is the supper ready, wife ?

MDME. VAUTIER. 'Tis only waiting, husband.

ANNA ASPER. And I am waiting for an answer, man ! Did you not hear my remarks ?

VAUTIER. I heard—and do *you* hear, sister-in-law ! If the rooks in the elms choose to chatter and quarrel, I give no heed to their raucous noise. But if they become objectionable, they are safer elsewhere.

ANNA ASPER. A groat for your rooks ! Is my godchild Brenda to marry Aurèle, or is she not ? Is the lass to be shamed after you have betrothed her ?

VAUTIER. Anna Asper ! if you are wise you will leave these things alone. They do not concern you.

ANNA ASPER. La ! And is the lass not my own kith and kin—my own godchild ? Yet, forsooth, it does not concern me !

VAUTIER. And she is *my* daughter. Look to your own household, woman ! I shall manage my own.

ANNA ASPER. Woman, indeed ! If I am your sister-in-law, you shall not woman me. *You* manage your house ! A pretty management to make it a byword to the whole town ! Hoots, man ! you need

## THE SMITHY

not glare at me. I tell you, you will be the laughing stock of the whole place.

VAUTIER (*advancing a step.*) Have you finished ?

ANNA ASPER. Oh, you will not frighten me, man ! Yes, I have finished.

VAUTIER. Then, Madame Asper, sister-in-law, or whatever name you prefer, let me tell you Neuveville is a good four hours' journey from here. It is time you were starting.

MDME. VAUTIER. But, husband ! Anna will stay for supper.

VAUTIER. I prefer my supper in peace. Asper is accustomed to this woman's clatter ; I am not.

ANNA ASPER. And it shall be many a long day before you hear it again, Louis Vautier. Woman's clatter ! No, Marie, you can do no good. If he begged me on his knees, I would not sup in this house. The bread would stick in my throat. Give me my cloak ! (*Throwing it over her shoulders.*) Anna Asper eats where she is welcome. No, I bear you no malice, Marie. You cannot make fennel sweet smelling. If rubbed it reeks. Go your ways, Louis Vautier ! When I come

## THE SMITHY

again beneath your roof, you shall be a humbler man. (*She passes out through right.*)

VAUTIER. Let her go ! She is better away. A hound which is always yapping is not pleasant company. Have you had any other visitors ?

MDME. VAUTIER. No, only my sister.

VAUTIER. Good ! Where is Steffan ? (*Raising his voice.*) Steffan !

(*Steffan enters from rear.*)

STEFFAN. Ay, Master.

VAUTIER. Is the lock completed ?

STEFFAN. It is on the bench. (*He moves over to same.*)

VAUTIE. Well, there is no need to show it to me, if it works all right. (*To Mme. Vautier*) We may as well go in and get ready for supper. Do you follow, Steffan, and tell Brenda !

(*Vautier and his wife retire through left.*)

(*Steffan, after glancing around, rapidly moves the candle to the end of the bench.*)

STEFFAN. It must be now, if ever. Fortune prosper her. (*He moves to foot of staircase at rear, calling cautiously*) Brenda, Brenda !

## THE SMITHY

*(In response, Brenda appears on balcony.)*

BRENDA. What is it, Steffan? Do you want me?

STEFFAN. Come down quickly—quickly, dear! He is coming—Aurèle is coming.

BRENDA *(grasping the rail)*. So soon! I feel giddy. Oh! is it safe? Is it safe, Steffan?

STEFFAN. The quicker the less risk. Do not waste a moment! *(Brenda descends to stage.)* The others are gone to get ready for supper. You are safe for a few minutes. The candle here is a signal—he is waiting outside. Do not speak too loud! I shall leave you alone. *(He retires through left.)*

BRENDA. Dear God! What happiness!

*(Aurèle tries the latch of door on right.)*

BRENDA. 'Tis he! Aurèle, my beloved!

AURÈLE *(entering)*. Brenda dear! At last! At last! *(He takes her in his arms.)*

BRENDA. I knew you would come, Aurèle—I knew you would come. Oh! I have longed, and longed.

AURÈLE. And I! I have waited. Ah, sweet, who would not? The seeking is forgotten when the treasure is found.

BRENDA. And all seemed so dark—so hopeless.

## THE SMITHY

The hours dragged with my feet. Ah ! love, I knew not how much to me you were, until the fear came of losing.

AURÈLE. Do I not know ? The world can offer nothing in exchange. There is no light such as lies in your eyes, love ; no sweetness such as your breath ; and no music such as thrills in your voice. I, too, have learnt what losing means.

BRENDA. Ah, dearest ! Was there love ever greater than ours ?

AURÈLE. Greater, there cannot be ; truer, there could not.

BRENDA. Hush, Aurèle ! They may hear our voices. Some one was moving within. Should they come, what can we say ?

AURÈLE. There is no one. I shall speak lower. And I have so much to say ; that is my reason for seeing you. You know, dear, the whole pitiful story ! There is no need to go over it again. Your father peremptory, and I unyielding. Then the fierce burst of anger. Who could have foreseen the results which would follow ? I never dreamt of such an ending. If I had I might have faltered, and yet—ah, no ! There is such a thing as honour. If there were only myself to consider, I would not hesitate ; but

## THE SMITHY

I stand no longer alone, I am linked with you, dearest ; our lives run together. The risks I might take alone, it does not follow I should face when another shares. You have a right to judge, my love. Whilst Tancrède stays, there is a barrier set up between us. And, after all, what friend has a greater claim than a wife ? Tell me, Brenda ! Am I right or wrong ? Should you speak the word, I shall not waver—Tancred goes.

BRENDA. Do not ask me, Aurèle ! A woman has only one guide—her heart. She will sacrifice everything for love. Love is her one anchor. She knows no other.

AURÈLE. Then let Love judge ! What judge could be kinder ?

BRENDA. No, no. To man and woman Love has a different meaning—to him it means home, wife, country, ambition and honour ; to the woman it spells only husband and child. Apart from these the world to her is nothing. Do not appeal to Love ! What woman is brave enough to fling it aside ?

AURÈLE. You have answered me. I was wrong. Poor Tancred must go.

BRENDA. And has the wrong only budded now ?

## THE SMITHY

Tell me, my beloved, was the wrong in evidence when you refused to comply with my father's wish, or has the doubt only arisen.

AURÈLE. Before Heaven, I have never doubted ; apart from you, I would act the same to-morrow.

BRENDA. Then the change cannot come now—not for me, Aurèle. Thank God the temptation is past. What was right yesterday, is right to-day. I will not speak the word.

AURÈLE. Yet happiness may rest upon it !

BRENDA. Ay, the happiness of a moment—the passing joy of a short dream ! In a flash the truth has dawned. For me you would draw back, and I gain this fleeting desire. Yes, I gain it ; but the purchase price extends over a lifetime. The reproach, the falling away, would for ever exist, though never a word was uttered. There are stains which can never be blotted out. I will not risk it. Your love I have now ; I will not sacrifice it for a dream.

AURÈLE. And yet, dear heart, in treading this path I may destroy it for ever.

BRENDA. Hindered or postponed it may be, my beloved ; but destroyed, never. My



## THE SMITHY

love and yours will not fade like a shadow. 'Tis the very strength of my love, Aurèle, which counsels me now. And yours I must hold and keep ; and there is no keeping, if founded on dishonour.

AURÈLE. You do not blame me ? You do not think I acted wrongfully ?

BRENDA (*with a smile*). You know better than I. I am satisfied that you have judged. Since my betrothed has chosen, I do not question.

AURÈLE. Ah ! Brenda, I expected no other answer. Despite all, a weight must always hang to my resolution, but you have lifted a greater heaviness. Driven from every town by cruel bigotry, I could not have turned poor Tanocrède adrift. I am no hero ; but, thank God, I cannot sink to play the coward.

BRENDA. And I would rather wait, like Rachel, seven years, and again seven years, to win a brave and worthy husband, than at pleasure mate with meanness. Your cause is mine ; I stand with you.

AURÈLE. So be it, dear ! Then we must face the future. What lies therein I cannot say ; still, hard or dark, we shall front it bravely.

## THE SMITHY

BRENDA. Together, my beloved ! Fret not for my sake ! To-day you are more to me than ever. There is no teacher like care ; for if friendship can claim such loyalty, what measure shall there be to your love ?

AURÈLE (*taking her in his arms*). None, sweet ? For it, I would have surrendered friendship—ay, even honour—if you had wished. And I surrender nothing, yet win a love that could not be greater or nobler.

*(From within Vautier is heard calling,  
Brenda ! Brenda ! Brenda girl !)*

BRENDA (*alarmed*). That is father ! Go quickly !

*(Vautier enters from left.)*

BRENDA. 'Tis too late, we can do nothing.

AURÈLE. Do not flinch, dear ! Better the worst should come and be known.

VAUTIER (*stopping suddenly*). So you are there ! We must wait our supper whilst you hold secret assignations with your lover ! Get you in, girl ! Have you ears ? Get you in at once ! I shall deal with this night-thief.

## THE SMITHY

BRENDA (*appealingly*). Father !

VAUTIER. I want no words. I want obedience.  
Within, girl !

AURÈLE. Hear first what I have to say. I am  
no night thief. I have a right to see  
my betrothed.

VAUTIER. What you and I have to say will come  
in due time. With the wench I shall  
deal later. (*To Brenda*) Must I speak  
again ?

BRENDA. My place is here. If Aurèle is wrong,  
I also am to blame.

VAUTIER. Wrong ! Is it thus you palter with  
deceit and shame ? On your knees  
shall you expiate your wickedness. But  
with your lover there is a different way.  
If you are wise, you will go.

BRENDA. I stay *here*. Our fault is one ; let the  
punishment be the same.

VAUTIER (*fiercely*). So all obedience has passed ?  
Harlot ! You speak the truth. Your  
place is by his side. Even a light-of-  
love clings to her false lover. Cling  
closer—closer ! The greater sin has been  
sinned.

AURÈLE (*hotly*). You lie, Louis Vautier, you  
lie ! Your daughter is as pure as the  
purest of women ; and you know it, you  
know it, and lie with the knowledge.

## THE SMITHY

No man shall say it of my beloved—not even her father.

VAUTIER. So I must take the word of her seducer for the fact—the word of a house thief—a night skulker! The door was barred, and I find the bolts drawn. A thief does not enter except to steal; and when so opportune as the night? I find her in your arms. I need no more. As you have besmirched her, so may you keep her.

AURÈLE (*passionately*). You have said too much—too much to be forgotten. God! You shall answer for it now. Stand back, Brenda, stand back! This is for me to settle, and the settlement shall be sharp and just.

VAUTIER (*seizing the large hammer by the side of the anvil*). Ay, wench, let your lover stand free. He will need room and space, for he has given me the lie, and wronged me deeper. The settlement shall be just and to the full.

AURÈLE. So be it. (*He suddenly throws himself on the Smith and succeeds in grasping him by the throat. For a few moments there is a sharp struggle, which finally ends in Vautier flinging Aurèle aside. The Smith raises the hammer to strike.*)

## THE SMITHY

VAUTIER. You dog! You would lay hands on me! By the Lord, I shall have no mercy.

*(In the meantime, during the struggle, Madame Vautier and Steffan have entered from the rear. Madame Vautier clings to her husband, whilst Steffan places himself in front of Aurèle.)*

MDME. VAUTIER. Husband, husband! Oh, listen to me, Louis!

VAUTIER. Away! He gripped me by the throat. The hound would have throttled me. God! I will read him a lesson.

STEFFAN. Steady, master! Have a care! There must be no mischief (*pushing Aurèle back*). Keep away, for her sake, if not for your own.

AURÈLE. He slandered her. I will not be balked!

STEFFAN. You are both mad—mad with anger and strife. Put your weapon away, Master! There is no fear of danger now.

VAUTIER (*flinging the hammer down*). Danger! Do I know what fear means? I only grasped it to strike home the quicker. Be easy, wife, I shall not maim him. Why should I quarrel over those who

## THE SMITHY

do not belong to me? Daughter! I have no daughter. The one has stolen her—the other forfeited her name. Go, slink to your shelters! There, you may nestle as you choose. Let *him* seek the obedience which I have missed. Let your lover guard what I cannot keep. You may want or starve. What is it to me? I have no child.

BRENDA (*with a cry*). Oh, Father! Father, have pity!

VAUTIER. I am not your Father. From this instant you pass out of my sight. To me my daughter is dead.

AURÈLE (*advancing to Brenda*). Weep not, Brenda! If home is no longer home I can give you one. You would have trusted yourself to me in a little while; can you not do so now? We might have waited for years, now our life is our own.

BRENDA (*appealingly*). Father, must I go!

VAUTIER (*turning his back*). I do not hear you. Your life no longer concerns me.

AURÈLE. Let Love guide you, dearest!

BRENDA. I come poor and portionless.

AURÈLE. Bring your own dear self; *there*, lie riches unnumbered. (*To Vautier*) Monsieur Vautier, what you could not value,

## THE SMITHY

I shall cherish ; what you would discard, I shall wear proudly. I thank you for your gift. The loss is yours—the gain is mine. Come, dear heart ! There is a fuller life than this.

BRENDA. I am ready.

*(They move to rear doorway on right, Brenda at times glancing backward, and pass out.)*

MDME. VAUTIER. She is gone, husband ! Brenda has gone !

VAUTIER. Speak not her name to me. I know it not. *(To Steffan)* Go bring me my Bible, which lies on the window table within—the large one which was my father's. *(Steffan retires to room at rear, re-entering with a large, heavily-bound Bible.)*

VAUTIER. Give it to me ! *(He turns over certain pages.)* Here is entered the line of the Vautiers—father and sons, wives and daughters, for two hundred years—and all have lived worthily. The list ends here. 'Tis the last entry of all. “ And Brenda, their first and only child, born July 6th, 1622.” What mockery ! We have no child. We only lived in a false dream. And shall the Sacred Book be

## THE SMITHY

defiled by a lie ? Shall its pages witness a falsehood ? No, no longer ; since we have learnt the truth. (*He tears out the page.*) The record is annulled. I call God to witness that here the line of Vautier ends. From this day there is none to claim kith or kin with me, or mine. Should I set eyes on her again, may God's hand fall heavy upon me ! In Thy Heaven above do Thou record my appeal. If I swerve from my resolve, do Thou mete me out the full measure of Thy wrath. Let me see her no more. She has passed into the night. Let the night enfold her.

CURTAIN.

END OF ACT II.



## ACT III

A living room in the house of Aurèle Felder. In shape it is irregular, the rear wall cutting off portion and forming a recess in the right corner. Into this recess opens the main entrance from outside. The pathway to same runs on the far side of the rear wall, so that persons approaching may be discerned through the low latticed window therein. The room itself is simply furnished—a table in centre, a spinning-wheel towards the front, and a cupboard beneath the window, being the principal furniture. Resting upon the table is an unlighted lamp, to which is attached a reflecting shade so that the light may be concentrated upon a limited space. The reflector may be turned in any direction. A cradle is also noticeable towards the front. There are exits both on right and left to the other portions of the house. The time is towards evening.

## THE SMITHY

Since the Second Act twelve months  
have transpired.

At the rise of the curtain, Brenda is  
discovered stooping over the cradle,  
crooning an old Swiss lullaby to her child.

BRENDA.        Ah, softly the breezes are blowing,  
                    Baby mine.

The kine in the meadows are lowing,  
                    Baby mine.

And beautiful flowers are growing,  
All for thee, for thee, Baby mine.

There are kingcups, bluebells, be-  
                    yond measure,  
                    Baby mine.

And daisies to weave at our leisure,  
                    Baby mine.

All waiting for thee, my sweet trea-  
                    sure,  
For thee, for thee, Baby mine.

And blithely the reapers are mowing,  
                    Baby mine,

The corn in the sunshine bright  
                    glowing,  
                    Baby mine.

And the labour, and reaping, and  
                    sowing,

Is for thee, for thee, Baby mine.

## THE SMITHY

Rest on, for the day is fast fleeting,  
Baby mine,  
No danger will touch thee whilst  
sleeping,  
Baby mine,  
Rest on, for God's angels are keeping  
Their watch over thee, Baby mine.

(*To herself*) Ah, darling ! surely God's angels will guard thee—awake or sleeping. There is not a sparrow falls unheeded. And what are they, to thee ? My sweet pet, who would harm you ?

(*Tancredé Masson enters from door at rear. As he stands for some moments irresolute as to advance or retire, there is time to observe the frail, delicate figure, and the thin, sensitive face with its unnatural colour. A short, dry, constant cough tells its own tale. He carries a portfolio of designs.*)

TANCRÉDE (*advancing*). May I come in, Mistress Brenda ?

BRENDA (*looking up*). It is you, Tancredé ! I did not expect you back so early.

TANCRÉDE. Nor would I have been, if I could have done anything ; but it is hopeless (*putting down portfolio*). They will look at

## THE SMITHY

nothing. They handed me back those lovely designs Aurèle drew for the Church doorway—the ones he sketched before he took ill—with not a word of explanation. I tried three or four of the old buyers. It was useless. They simply turned away, or avoided me on some pretext. One would think the designs would contaminate them.

BRENDA (*rising*). Never mind, Tancrède ! You must be tired. Let me get you some milk.

TANCRÈDE. No, do not trouble over me. Keep it for the little one. I shall soon be rested. And you have enough to try you. How is he ? How is Aurèle to-day ?

BRENDA. Just the same, neither better nor worse. He tried to walk a little, but could scarcely move his limbs. He has grown so helpless. I left him sleeping. He is always sleeping, always ready to sleep.

TANCRÈDE. Poor Aurèle ! 'Tis bad enough for the weak to see their little strength gradually ebb away, but for the strong, the lusty—ah, Brenda, it is pitiable.

BRENDA. I had hopes once, strong hopes. Now they are very weak, and fast melting away.

TANCRÈDE. Oh, you must not, you must not. He

## THE SMITHY

has no pain. He never complains of any pain ! The sickness may pass as strangely as it came.

BRENDA. I pray night and day that it may. If prayers would bring health he would not be sleeping now.

TANCRÊDE. Has the old Doctor said aught ?

BRENDA. Nothing but hopes, always hopes. Month after month it is the same, and yet there is no change. Even hopes grow faint from want of something to feed upon.

TANCRÊDE. Yet still the old Doctor has dropped no hint ?

BRENDA. Not in words ; but a woman can learn from a glance. And lately his voice has grown kinder—not that it is not always kind—but *this* is more. I understand its meaning.

TANCRÊDE. Would all men were as kind ! Do you know what the neighbours are saying ? I learnt it for the first time to-day.

BRENDA. They keep aloof ; what matter how they gossip ?

TANCRÊDE. They are talking of Aurèle and his illness. They call it a visitation of God—a punishment for associating with me, a child of the devil.

BRENDA (*musings*). A visitation of God ! Is His

## THE SMITHY

the hand that deals out all our misfortunes? No; it cannot be. One of our neighbour's children—poor Madame Dumont's little girl—was burnt to death only last fortnight. Was *that* also His act? What sin had the lassie committed? 'Tis the same with my dear husband. There is no answer to be sought, though our suffering wails a cry to Heaven itself.

TANCRÊDE. And some day, dear Brenda, there will come a reply. For me, it cannot be long; but I have only mentioned their gossip to explain the step I am taking. 'Tis better that I should go — and quickly.

BRENDA. Tancrède! We do not think so—Aurèle or I.

TANCRÊDE. No, no; but I have no right to stay. That is merely one reason. There is a greater one. Food is growing scant, and I can do nothing to eke it out. For the last week I have tramped and tried ever so eagerly to dispose of my carving, or get anything for work, and the result is nothing. I have not broken it to you before, for each day there was a hope, but it is idle to conceal it longer. The best work of a heretic will not tempt

## THE SMITHY

them. I cannot eat any longer your bread. I must fare elsewhere.

BRENDA. To what we have, you are welcome ; the poor can always give. And Aurèle, Aurèle will not hear of it.

TANCRÈDE. I know, so I have arranged everything. I set out to-night.

BRENDA. To-night ! Why, where can you go ?

TANCRÈDE. To Paris, Brenda, to Paris. Old Pierre is leaving to-night with his van. I begged from him a place—and he carries me as far as Lyons. The rest I can walk. *There* I may do something ; from *there* I will be able to send you assistance. You do not know what happiness it is, only to dream of helping. Paris ! If I had the whole wealth of Paris to offer for what you have given me, it would only be a poor return.

BRENDA. But Paris is a long way off from Lyons. Have you strength enough to walk so far ?

TANCRÈDE. A week will be sufficient. *Here* the week would be ten times heavier—to trapse fruitlessly day after day, and come back empty like the last ; but *there*, there is a promise at the journey's end. And I am stronger now, ever so much stronger.

BRENDA. Are you honest, Tancrède ?

## THE SMITHY

TANCRÊDE. Yes, yes ; I am stronger, indeed.

BRENDA. At what hour do you start ?

TANCRÊDE. Pierre is to be at the brow of the hill at seven (*glancing at a heavy, old-fashioned watch*). It is on the half hour, so I have still another thirty minutes to get ready.

BRENDA. You will need some food to take with you. I must find you some. (*She moves apart.*)

TANCRÊDE. Nay, Brenda. I have arranged all that. For this old watch Pierre will find me as far as Lyons. Keep every mouthful for yourself. I shall fare plenteously.

BRENDA. You are sure ?

TANCRÊDE. There is no doubt.

BRENDA. Then I shall see if Aurèle wants for anything. In a moment I shall return. (*She retires through right.*)

TANCRÊDE (*musings*). Ah, if gifts were in my bestowal this home should want for nothing. (*After cautiously looking around he advances to the cradle and withdraws his watch.*) It may purchase something ; and they say there is no lack of clocks in Paris. (*He hides the watch amongst the cradle clothes.*) 'Twould be silly to carry it.



## THE SMITHY

*(Brenda reappears at door on right, wheeling Aurèle forward in a rough chair. He is only a shadow of his former self. The eyes have lost their lustre, the face its glow of health. Evidently he has been attacked by a form of spinal paralysis.)*

BRENDA *(halting at doorway)*. Will you help me, Tancrède ?

TANCRÈDE *(running towards them)*. Where would you like it, Aurèle ?

AURÈLE. Near the table, Tancrède. *(They move him towards same.)* Would you turn my back to the light ? I am tired of gazing through the windows. To see the world makes my helplessness seem harder.

BRENDA. *(arranging his wraps)*. Is that comfortable, dear ?

AURÈLE. Ah, darling ! I never thought when I wedded you that I was offering such a useless carcase. I dreamt to make you happy. I would have too, but the Heavens have fought against me.

BRENDA. And you *have*, my beloved. Have you not given me husband and child ? Poverty may lie close, but we are closer. Even poverty may be forgotten when shared with those we love.

## THE SMITHY

AURÈLE. But *I* am the breadwinner—and worthless.

BRENDA (*kneeling beside him.*) You are my dear, dear husband, my own heart—my desired !

AURÈLE. Poor wife !

TANCRÈDE. No shadow would have fallen but for me. 'Twill disappear soon, Aurèle.

AURÈLE. Did you manage to do anything with the designs I gave you ? I thought you would succeed in disposing of some.

TANCRÈDE. There is nothing to be done. Louis Vautier and the Pastor have done their work well. The folk will not speak, buy, nor assist.

AURÈLE. Ah, if I could only fight, I should not care. I would beat down their efforts. But to be struck down like a child—to be freighted with a pair of dead limbs, and all vigour gone. Ah, it is cruel. (*Despairingly*) Oh, God, dear God ! give me strength again ; give me my manhood once more. Wife and child are hungering, and I would work, work and toil for them. I cannot rise ; I cannot kneel, my limbs are lifeless. Do not therefore spurn me ! Do not therefore spurn me ! (*Half sobbing.*) I only ask

## THE SMITHY

for strength to labour. Oh, God, dear God, hear my prayer !

BRENDA (*soothingly*). Ah, husband, do not cry so bitterly ! You must rest—in rest lies your recovery.

AURÈLE (*bitterly*). And I should work. I could weep tears of bitterness. Hope, there is no hope. Is there even a God ?

BRENDA. Ah, hush, dearest ! We have still each other—you and I—I and you.

AURÈLE (*breaking down*). Forgive me, darling ! 'Tis only a sick man speaking—a blighted piece of handiwork. Hale, I would not doubt. But my heart—my heart, wife, is breaking.

BRENDA. Courage, beloved ! We set our faces to front ill times. Patience, dear, and we shall pass through safely.

AURÈLE. There is no winning through. He has shorn me of my strength.

TANCRÈDE. In a little way I may help. Since I have been the cause of all this sorrow, you will not grudge me, Aurèle ?

AURÈLE. What is it, Tancrède ? I shall not stand in your way.

TANCRÈDE. I have already spoken to Brenda. Here, I am only a drag. There is an opening in Paris. I am leaving to-night.

## THE SMITHY

AURÈLE. Some one has spoken to you ?

TANCRÈDE. No, not a soul ! I go voluntarily, and for the best.

AURÈLE. I can offer you little now, Tancrède—either in shelter or protection. You have decided ?

TANCRÈDE. Yes.

AURÈLE. 'Tis a small chance. I shall wish you God-speed. May you light on prosperity, and find Paris extend a greater welcome than Neuchâtel.

TANCRÈDE. 'Tis the fortune tempts me. I do not expect to find kindness such as I leave behind.

AURÈLE. Tush ! What is a portion of bread, and a sup from a bowl of milk !

TANCRÈDE. When the loaf is small and the bowl of scanty measure, it is manna from Heaven. And here I have known happiness, the only happiness I have tasted in life. Do you think its sweetness shall ever pass away ? To me, home had no meaning, until you and Brenda spelt it for me. I cannot thank you—you or Brenda. I cannot repay you—only in love—merely with love. No, do not stop me ; let me speak ! I have only words to offer ; but they are the coinage of my heart. Forgive me, dear Brenda, forgive me, Aurèle,

## THE SMITHY

for the misery I have brought amongst you.

AURÈLE. This illness is not yours. There is nothing to forgive.

BRENDA. No, nothing, Tancrède. Such as we have given has been repaid in full. I have learnt why Aurèle loved you, and have come to share his love.

TANCRÈDE. Ah, your gifts have no limit and allow of no forgetting. *There is old Pierre's horn! He must be ascending the hill. I am going, but I do not leave you. With me you shall be ever present, never absent. (Kneeling and kissing Brenda's hand.)* Good-bye, dear Brenda, good-bye. If I were a king I should shower into your lap rubies and pearls; but I can drop nothing. I am only a beggar. Good-bye! *(Taking Aurèle's hand.)* And, Aurèle! For me, dear friend, you have sacrificed the happiness of life. God give me a little longer term, and I may return you a slight portion. Farewell!

AURÈLE. Farewell, lad!

TANCRÈDE. 'Tis the ending! Good-bye. *(He rushes out through the rear.)*

AURÈLE. See the last of him, Brenda. Speed him also for me.

BRENDA *(moving to rear and gazing out through*

## THE SMITHY

*doorway*). He will be in view till they pass the hill. Pierre has stopped, and taken his bundle. He is looking back, Aurèle (*she waves her kerchief*), and returning my greetings. Now they are moving on—Pierre and he are walking beside the van. (*Waving.*) Good-bye, Tancredi, good-bye! They are upon the crest. He is standing bareheaded. (*Wiping her eyes.*) I cannot see now so far. Ah, husband, he is gone. (*She advances towards Aurèle.*)

AURÈLE. We shall miss him. One parts reluctantly with anything one has struggled for.

BRENDA. Yes, we shall miss him. Shall I light the lamp, or would you sooner rest quietly?

AURÈLE. No, not yet. I would sooner talk to you, dear. But will you get the small box which is in the cupboard by the chimney?

BRENDA (*moving to right*). The one which was not completed?

AURÈLE. Ay, the casket I intended for you. That is it. Put it here where I can reach it. (*Brenda places it upon the table standing by his side*). Now sit down,

## THE SMITHY

dearest. (*Brenda seats herself at his feet.*)

We have only ourselves.

BRENDA. You have no pain, Aurèle ?

AURÈLE. No, none. My head is easier, too. I shall not forget myself again. Give me your hand, dear ! To hold it brings back encouragement and hope.

BRENDA. 'Tis only strong in love, husband mine.

AURÈLE. And womanhood and gentleness and sympathy ! I knew all rested therein. There was no call to test them. And would the call had never come ! Do you ever question the wisdom or the folly of your step ?

BRENDA. The only folly, love, would have been in the refusal. No mists enshrouded my choice. There was no false glamour. I chose willingly, husband ; and sooner than lose you would choose again.

AURÈLE. Small choice was left us, and now there is even less. The prospect is not bright. I have been thinking—I am always thinking—of the best to be done. We have schooled ourselves to do without so many things that there is little to economise upon. The child must have some clothes—and there is the coming quarter's rent. That paid, we need only consider our food—hardly an extravagant

## THE SMITHY

item now-a-days. I have only ten gulden left to meet everything. We must try and realise on these. (*Reaching for the box.*) They are mostly old trinkets—the belongings of my parents. Not of very great value, for they were simple people.

BRENDA. Can we not keep them? Why should strangers have the handling?

AURÈLE. I would sooner keep you, dearest, and the child. No, there is no option. (*Drawing out several articles.*) *This* is my father's ring. 'Tis heavy; it might bring twelve or perhaps fourteen florins. *Here* are my mother's hair ornaments. Poor old mother! Many a time has she lovingly admired them. Perhaps they are old-fashioned—the women do not seem to wear them now. I am only selling them for bread; dear mother, you will forgive! They may fetch another ten. *Here* is her silver buckle! (*Fingering a brooch.*) Ah, *this* must not go as it is. 'Tis her brooch. See, it contains my hair at the back. 'Tis fair enough now, but look how fair it was then. They will not give a pfenning more for my locks. (*Taking a knife and opening the brooch.*) Do you keep it,



## THE SMITHY

Brenda ! It will match the child's. The rest are of slight value. A few florins will cover them.

BRENDA (*rising*). I will try yours beside our boy's. (*She moves to cradle.*) Yours is fairer, Aurèle ! Oh, far more fair ! My darling, sleep on ! May God treat you kindly ! His little hands are clenched as if he would beat off all dangers. My brave, bonnie man ! (*In arranging the cradle she touches Tancred's watch.*) Here is something hard ! What can it be ? (*She discovers the watch.*) Oh, Aurèle, 'tis a watch—Tancred's watch !

AURÈLE. Tancred's watch ! You must be mistaken !

BRENDA. No, no. He showed it to me just before he left. It was to find him food as far as Paris. He told me so, and for that reason would take no food from us. I am not mistaken. How can it have come here ?

AURÈLE. Did you leave him afterwards ? Did you leave him alone.

BRENDA. Only to run and see you.

AURÈLE. Then, Brenda, the explanation is simple. 'Tis poor Tancred's last gift.

BRENDA. Can we do nothing with it ? He will be forced to beg.

## THE SMITHY

AURÈLE. We can only keep it. We have no address, and Tancrède meant it for a gift. Keep it, Brenda! Keep it till the last.

*(Steffan opens the door at rear.)*

STEFFAN. May I come in? Are you alone?

AURÈLE. Ah, you, Steffan; come in! We are quite alone. There is only Brenda and I. Poor Tancrède has gone.

*(Steffan advances, carrying a small cheese.)*

STEFFAN. I met him going down the hill—with old Pierre. He sent back remembrances. I should not think Neuchâtel, apart from you, will supply him with much worth remembering.

AURÈLE. No; Neuchâtel does not breed much charity.

STEFFAN. Not much in the old home at present. The day's work goes on with scarcely a word. We simply hammer, and hammer, and hammer. 'Tis well the iron requires so much tempering. I am glad the year will see me through my indentures.

AURÈLE. And then?

STEFFAN. I go to Geneva. I am heartily weary of this place. *(Perceiving the ornaments*

## THE SMITHY

*on table.*) Golden trinkets! I—I did not know you had any.

AURÈLE. They are merely some old ornaments of my people; I—I—was just showing them to Brenda.

STEFFAN. May I look at them, Aurèle?

AURÈLE (*pushing them towards him*). Of course. They are not of much importance.

STEFFAN (*examining them*). They are pretty. Are not *these* hair ornaments?

AURÈLE. Yes, my mother's!

STEFFAN (*with an attempt to hide his purpose*). Did I mention it to you? I—I—intended to. My sister is anxious, fearfully anxious to get a set. I—I promised to give her one, but have never seen any. I wish you were disposing of these. I would give *any* price.

AURÈLE. They are of little value except for the gold. The fashion has altered.

STEFFAN. I don't care what the fashion is. They are the very thing Lisette wants. Will you let me have them, Aurèle? You cannot dream how they will be admired.

AURÈLE (*endeavouring to conceal his poverty*). I could not think of selling them, Steffan. A man would only part with such trinkets if he were on the borderland of want. We (*with a short laugh*), well, we are not

## THE SMITHY

excessively wealthy ; but, thank Heaven, we have no need to sell them. I—I—was merely showing them to Brenda.

STEFFAN. I am sorry—of course only for myself. They would have just suited Lisette.

AURÈLE (*drawing attention to parcel Steffan has previously placed upon the table*). But you have already been making purchases. Something larger than hair ornaments.

STEFFAN (*blunderingly*). Oh, *this* ! 'Tis the silliest thing in the world. Coming along I passed old Mère Perrin's. She saw me approaching—and—and the old lady has the stupid idea that once I did her a service. I—I—repaired her spinning-wheel, or something of the sort ; so she thrust this cheese into my hands ; she would take no refusal. Of course, what was I to do with a cheese ? I told you it was a silly affair. So I brought it on. You must try and use it. There, I simply won't carry it back.

BRENDA (*moving to centre*). Thank you, Steffan. Your gift is welcome ; and your kindness is the greater when covered by a pretext.

AURÈLE. And I appreciate it also. Let us be frank with each other. I was thinking of selling these trinkets, for necessity

## THE SMITHY

compels me. I mislead you. God ! there is no sensitiveness like poverty. And you ? You were aware of our need, you understood our position ; and the wish to buy—the story of Mère Perrin's gift—was a blind whilst extending help. It is so, Steffan, is it not ?

STEFFAN. I got the cheese from Mère Perrin.

AURÈLE. Yes, and paid for it ?

STEFFAN. I do not see what that matters. *There* is the cheese, I will not carry it back.

BRENDA. You shall not, best of friends. It will go a long way—a very long way.

STEFFAN. Thank you, Brenda. And the trinkets ?

AURÈLE. No, we will not take your money. But you can help us, Steffan. You might sell them more readily. Do not say where they come from ; we will keep our poverty to ourselves.

STEFFAN. I shall do so with pleasure (*taking the trinkets*), and you may be sure I shall say nothing. But when the news spreads that Tancredi is gone, things will mend. They cannot keep up their ill-will. You must get well quickly, Aurèle, for the good times will be soon coming.

AURÈLE (*wearily*). They will need to come quickly. The days are fast drawing in.

## THE SMITHY

*(A fumbling of the latch is heard from the rear door.)*

BRENDA. Some one is trying the latch !

STEFFAN. I shall go. Do you not trouble !

*(He moves to door at rear as Anna Asper succeeds in opening it.)*

ANNA ASPER. Oh, it is you, young man ! Why are you not beating fire-dogs, and plough-shares, and iron bars ?

STEFFAN. I—I—just stepped in to see Aurèle and Brenda.

ANNA ASPER. And so have I. Do not stare at me, you young giant. Can a woman not visit her sister's child without being stared at ? But perhaps you are admiring my cap ! Well, you do not see such caps in your gloomy old Neuchâtel. Let me tell you that. *(Advancing.)* Ah, Brenda, my godchild, I am glad to see you. But send that young Amalek away. He just cannot take his eyes off me.

STEFFAN *(laughing)*. I was leaving, Mistress. Truth, it would be a good sight if your cap was oftener seen in our place, if only to hear some of the straight talking which comes from beneath it.

ANNA ASPER. Hoots ! the young giant has some discernment. Now get away, little man !

## THE SMITHY

STEFFAN. Then good-bye, Mistress Asper ; and brighter luck to you, Brenda, and to you, Aurèle ! (*Touching his pocket containing the ornaments.*) I shall not forget. (*He retires.*)

ANNA ASPER. He is not so stupid as his master, and that is something to be thankful for. (*To Aurèle.*) I am truly sorry, Aurèle Felder, to find you laid up like a helpless old man. One takes for granted to see a white-haired, aged creature sitting about ; but a young fellow in his prime —la, it is not natural.

AURÈLE (*sleepily*). Yes ! it is not natural. But I am tired, tired and weary. I think I shall sleep for a while.

ANNA ASPER. Do, lad, if you want to. I can say what I have to say to my godchild.

BRENDA (*arranging a cushion*). Yes, rest, dearest. Would you wish the cushion raised ?

AURÈLE (*dozing off*). 'Tis quite comfortable, quite comfortable. Do not trouble over me, darling. (*He falls asleep.*)

ANNA ASPER. Bless me, how very strange ! If he has not fallen asleep like a child ! Does he do that often, girl ?

BRENDA. Oh, often, Aunt. Four or five times in the day. At one time he did not sleep

## THE SMITHY

so much, but now he is constantly dozing. It seems as if he could not keep awake, and will rest for two or three hours.

ANNA ASPER. I never heard of such a thing. Will our talking disturb him? Shall we go into the inner room?

BRENDA. There is no need, and I prefer to be by him. Your voice will not annoy him. He sleeps—oh, so soundly!

ANNA ASPER. Lord, it is like talking with a corpse in the room. No, I did not mean that. But you must have wondered why all these months I have not been near you. Not since the bairnie was born.

BRENDA. We often spoke of you, Aunt.

ANNA ASPER. Well, the roads have been so bad, what with the snow and the rain, that it has been impossible to come in. And no news has filtered our way for weeks. I only heard things were going badly with you, and all about this sickness of your man three days ago, so I jogged in at the first chance.

BRENDA. We thought that was the reason. We were sure you had not forgotten us.

ANNA ASPER. Forgotten, rubbish! Anna Asper does not forget her own kith and kin, even if their own pig-headed people do.



## THE SMITHY

I do not care a rap for their religious humbug. Your own blood first, say I. Time afterwards to rub cheeks with the elect and perfect. That reminds me to ask you. What has that grim-faced father of yours been doing lately ?

BRENDA. We see no one from the old home, nor from the town. Even the neighbours hold aloof. Only Doctor Stultz, and Steffan, who comes secretly.

ANNA ASPER. A pretty group of saints they all are ! In my opinion they would see far more chance of doing good if they took their eyes off heaven for a while, and looked around them. As for that sour-faced smith—oh, I will have my say—he called me woman, woman. Well, I shall look him up and ease my mind.

BRENDA. No good will come of it, Aunt. My name is never spoken. Aurèle and I do not belong to his world.

ANNA ASPER. Nonsense ! People cannot wipe their offspring out of the world so easily ; not when they once have brought them into it. I shall go down this next week, and he may hammer and bang about as he pleases ; he will have to listen. I'm not a woman that has much to say, you know that, my dear ; but if I once get

## THE SMITHY

warmed up, I can just ding along for hours. Not that I will be beholden to him for a mouthful of food—he refused it me once—the old bear. I shall take my meal with me and eat it in his smithy.

BRENDA. I would rather you did not go. A quarrel will sure to ensue.

ANNA ASPER. Mercy on us! A breeze will not frighten me. And to clear the heavy air there is naught like a good thunder-storm.

BRENDA (*glancing at Aurèle*). Excuse me, Aunt! Aurèle is restless. (*She rearranges his rug.*) He has not awakened. All we want is to be left in peace. I should tell you, Aunt—Tancrède—Tancrède Masson left us to-day.

ANNA ASPER (*surprised*). The Lord be thanked! And a good thing to. He should have flitted six months ago. A good riddance, say I.

BRENDA. We do not think so, my husband or I.

ANNA ASPER. Of course you do not. Who would expect two such soft-hearted children to think it? Oh, when you grow older you become more callous. Why, when I was a young lassie I used to weep every time my young fowls had to be killed. I

## THE SMITHY

remember once like a baby keeping on a fine cock bird which was attacked by the roup, I was so fond of it—just like you and your Tancrède—with the result I lost all my yard. Now, I have no sentiment. In they go to the stockpot, and the yard is kept sweet. Charity, my child, is like mace—a pinch or two gives flavour to the dish, but too much of it will ruin everything.

*(Doctor Stultz enters at rear.)*

STULTZ (*advancing*). When Anna Asper draws her wisdom from the kitchen, there is none who dare question. And of a truth, in this instance you are right. Kindness is often an agent of mischief; both to the bestower and the recipient. Still, it is a wrong we will not cavil over. (*He removes a heavy cloak.*)

BRENDA. Doctor Stultz! Oh, I am so glad you have come.

STULTZ. Did you think I would forget you? Scarcely. I would have been here sooner, but poor human nature is always calling for guidance, and I am beginning to lose my briskness.

BRENDA. You must not, dear Doctor. We cannot afford to miss you.

## THE SMITHY

STULTZ. Ah, there are younger men coming on—younger, and so much cleverer. Old heads fight shy of novelties. We have tested too many.

BRENDA. Shall I light the lamp ?

STULTZ. If you please, my dear. 'Tis dark in here coming in from the outside. And there are clouds hanging about. A storm is slowly brewing.

BRENDA. I shall not be a moment. I have the tinder and flint on the table.

STULTZ. Is it here ? Then allow me. I pride myself on my expertness. (*He handles the flint and quickly strikes a spark, igniting the tinder.*) There ! a younger man could not do better.

BRENDA. Could they in anything ? (*She lights the lamp from the ignited tinder.*)

STULTZ (*smiling*). Some, you see, still believe in me. Now for my patient. (*He turns the shade so as to throw the light on Aurèle.*) Still sleeping ? How many hours has he slept to-day ?

BRENDA. Nearly four hours, without counting this.

STULTZ. Is that from noon ?

BRENDA. Yes. He never leaves his bedroom now before twelve.

STULTZ. Four hours ! H'm ! Well, you women

## THE SMITHY

may go on talking. I will have a look at my invalid.

*(Brenda moves apart with Anna Asper, and during their conversation Stultz proceeds to carefully examine Aurèle. He is evidently anxious; at first feeling the pulse, and then, as if dissatisfied, running his hand beneath the vest over the heart.)*

ANNA ASPER *(to Brenda)*. Some women love to have the Doctor for ever in the house. As for me, I cannot abear them. The Lord never did a kinder thing than when he placed a skin over our body and shut everything out of sight. And to have them probing and probing around—ugh, I cannot abide it.

BRENDA. Ah, Aunt, you have always been hale. You do not know what it is to hang upon a word—a look—to read the message before it is spoken.

ANNA ASPER. No; in the whole of my life I have never breakfasted in bed. Not many can say the same. After all, a man is sometimes a great comfort in the house. The creatures are serviceable in their proper places.

STULTZ *(moving forward)*. I am quite satisfied. I think I can see the future clearly.

## THE SMITHY

BRENDA (*eagerly*). You can speak with certainty, Doctor—with certainty at last ?

STULTZ (*quickly*). Yes ; with certainty—almost absolute certainty. Could you give me a bowl of milk, Brenda ? I have not been home since morning.

BRENDA. Oh, how thoughtless of me. I will get you something at once. (*She moves to right.*)

STULTZ. No more than the milk, my dear. I could not eat anything.

(*Brenda retires.*)

ANNA ASPER. Milk, Doctor, only milk ! No wonder you are losing your briskness !

STULTZ. 'Twas merely an excuse to get rid of the poor child for a moment. I want a few words with you, Mère Asper.

ANNA ASPER. No probing or digging your fingers into me ! I need no medicines.

STULTZ. 'Tis of him—of Aurèle, I wish to speak. Is it necessary for you to return to your husband to-night ? Can you manage to remain here ?

ANNA ASPER (*sharply*). What do you mean, man ? I can stay if there be need. Is that what you mean ?

STULTZ. Yes. Some one should be with her to-night. She must not be left alone.

## THE SMITHY

You must find some excuse to stay. Do not frighten her—say the weather—the roads—anything. Only stay.

ANNA ASPER (*softly*). Is he passing, Doctor?

STULTZ. He is so low that at any moment the cord may snap. I have been expecting it, but the change has come quicker than I thought.

ANNA ASPER. Does Brenda suspect?

STULTZ. I have not had the heart to break it to her. Besides, there was always a chance. She has no idea. Perhaps I was wrong. But I love the lass; and when the heart controls, the judgment is ever at fault.

ANNA ASPER. She should be told now; before it is too late.

STULTZ. I will do so. May God assist me in preparing the soil; and may He, the Father of the Fatherless, succour her in her need.

(*Brenda re-enters bearing a bowl.*)

STULTZ (*taking same*). Thank you, my dear.

ANNA ASPER (*removing her wrap*). The Doctor has just frightened me. That follows, Brenda, from leaving us alone. He says a thunderstorm is gathering over the hills, and advises me not to venture back.

## THE SMITHY

Can you put me up for the night, god-child ? I shall not trouble you. I can manage for myself.

BRENDA. Of course, Aunt. There is our room. We have not used it the last week.

ANNA ASPER. Then I shall make myself at home. I have a mortal horror of thunder and lightning. No, don't stir, child ! Never mind me. Stay here with your good man and the Doctor. (*She retires through left.*)

STULTZ. You may leave her, Brenda, to arrange matters. Aunt Asper is accustomed to making herself comfortable. Practical people like her avoid by instinct the rough corners. 'Tis you and I who need so much attention.

BRENDA. And I am anxious, so anxious to hear all about Aurèle.

STULTZ. And I to speak of him.

BRENDA. You can spare me the time !

STULTZ. Yes ; I am in no hurry. My day's work is done. Shall we not place ourselves at our ease ? Why not rest whilst I prattle ? You must be tired. To humour me, you will be seated. (*Offering a chair.*)

BRENDA. Do *you* take that for yourself ! I shall sit by the child and spin. (*She seats her-*



## THE SMITHY

*self beside the cradle, and proceeds to prepare her spinning-wheel.)*

STULTZ. Then I can do no better than here. *(Placing his chair to the right and slightly in the rear of Brenda.)* For I can watch your deft fingers at work—the light is in my favour ; and, if necessary, observe Aurèle.

BRENDA. Ah, tell me of him ! You said you could speak with certainty. Has the change come at last ?

STULTZ *(still standing)*. Yes. The change has come, my dear—at last. I have doubts no longer.

BRENDA *(mistaking him)*. Oh, I am so glad ! Dear Doctor, you cannot judge how glad ! And Aurèle was so despondent, so utterly hopeless this afternoon. Ah, it has been a slow and weary struggle.

STULTZ. Ay, for you both. Well, the change has set in. Soon there will be an ending to all this patient suffering. Relief always comes when most desired.

BRENDA. Ah, I prayed, and God above has heard. *(Sinking on her knees beside the cradle.)* He has heard me, my little one—the good God has not forgotten us. He has remembered us—you, my sweet bairnie ; and me, your mother. He has not

## THE SMITHY

forsaken us. He would not see thee fatherless, dearie ; so he has sent His angels—His beautiful angels—and they will make father strong and well—poor father, who has suffered so much. See, Doctor, the little fellow is smiling, and I am crying for joy—for nothing but joy. Dear God ! I thank Thee for Thy great goodness. Thou knewest how I loved him, and my cry has reached heaven. Thou hast spared him in Thy infinite mercy. Oh, Father of all, I thank Thee.

STULTZ (*reverently*). Let us thank Him, my child, not only for His infinite pity, but for His unsearchable wisdom. If God stretch forth a hand, who are we to question its justice ?

BRENDA (*rising*). And I doubted. Oh, Doctor, I doubted. I, to whom He has given so much. Ah, never again !

STULTZ. Do not let it grieve you. A cry of despair was once wrung from Higher lips.

BRENDA (*reseating herself*). You bring Him closer, dear Doctor, than Pastor or Minister. You seem to live in His presence.

STULTZ. It may be. Perhaps the reason is, that for so many years I have been in touch with His handiwork. (*Seating*

## THE SMITHY

*himself*.) The world sees mankind at work or play, struggling for success, eager to achieve prosperity, not altogether lovable. I see them broken, downcast, and ailing ; and in poor suffering humanity I have found greater nobility, purer love, and truer friendship than is to be learnt elsewhere. And I have seen so much (*with a glance towards Aurèle*)—even Death.

BRENDA. Do not speak of Death. To lose all we hold dearest—to say the last good-bye. Oh, it is fearful !

STULTZ. Not so, Brenda—'tis far otherwise. Believe me, I speak truly. 'Tis the last gift of Nature, when all else fails. When the frame is shattered beyond repair, when pain can be no longer borne—'tis the final relief. No harsh intruder, but a welcome guest.

BRENDA. Yet to lie cold and senseless !

STULTZ. Senseless ! Is that to be feared ? Think, my child ! Should our head throb we seek gladly sleep. Does its want of sense appal us ? Sufficient it is to lose our pain. And even in sleep who knows when the curtained eyelids fall and the borderland is passed ? And there are pains and heartaches which

## THE SMITHY

slumber will not ease—only the sleep of eternity.

BRENDA. You discuss it only as a physician.

STULTZ. No ; I have tasted its bitterness and sweetness. Forty years ago—before you were born—my wife, my dearly-loved wife, was called away. Three years of happy communion, Brenda ; only three years. Comelier, woman could not be—nor purer. I thought life offered no more—that the future was a blank.

BRENDA. Ah, Doctor ; pardon me !

STULTZ. Hear all, little woman. Forty years have passed, and my loss is now my gain. You doubt ? Ah, you do not understand. I am old and worn, but *she*, she has never aged. To me, she is ever the same. Death has robbed Time of its spoils. In the quiet hours memory brings back her presence. We live again—she ever beautiful, and I her lover still.

BRENDA (*gently extending a hand*). And there is always heaven—heaven as a meeting-place.

STULTZ. Yes ; heaven remains. But look, the little one is growing restless, the light disturbs him. I will move the shade.

(*He turns the shade so as to throw the light*

## THE SMITHY

*of the lamp full upon Aurèle's face. The real object of the action, namely to watch with greater intentness the state of the sick man, is lost upon Brenda. During the ensuing dialogue Stultz's attention is divided between Brenda and Aurèle. The latter is evidently sinking fast.)*

STULTZ. To me Death is no mystery. Life is the one and all. The leaf falls, the day draws in. The world is really peopled by the dead—the living are so few. (*Noticing the flax of Brenda's spinning-wheel has become entangled.*) Ah, I am wearing you—the flax is entangled.

BRENDA. That often happens. I must cut the thread, and begin again.

STULTZ. So Death cuts the skein which cannot be unravelled; and then, we piece the ends together again, and, forgetting, continue our spinning.

BRENDA. Death could never be welcome. Your words are empty and meaningless. Have I not dreaded its approach day after day? Its shadow has only just departed; but not the fear, the terror.

STULTZ (*leaning slightly forward*). Brenda! You *must* believe me. You must banish your fear and dread. Of all the angels, none is gentler and kinder than the Angel of

## THE SMITHY

Death. He does not ride upon the tempest or the blast ; he does not announce his approach with storm and thunder. He comes in love, not anger—and so noiselessly—so gently. He will not even knock for fear his entry should alarm ; but creeps in gently and unnoticed. The lamp is still burning—the spinning is not stopped—the child still sleeps. His presence is not observed. And softly he glides past to the couch of sickness. For an instant he gazes with pitying eyes, then stoops, and tenderly kisses the hot, flushed brow. No more, Brenda, my dear child, no more. Death has come and gone. (*He turns the light off Aurèle, whose head has suddenly fallen back with the pallor of death.*)

BRENDA (*rising with a start*). Oh, Doctor ! My God ! You mean it has come !

STULTZ. Courage, my poor lass ! Yes ; Death has come and gone. Give me your hand, dear ! His sleep will not be broken again. (*He leads her towards the couch.*) Your sorrow is your own ; would I could bear it !

BRENDA (*throwing herself upon the body*). Oh, Aurèle ! Aurèle ! Come back to me,

## THE SMITHY

Aurèle. I cannot lose you. Do not leave me alone ! Oh, Aurèle, come back !

STULTZ. He will not hear, my child. He will not answer. No cry will reach. He rests in peace. (*He draws the rug upwards and covers the face as Brenda, sobbing, sinks to the floor.*) Weep, little one, weep ! All the consolation the world can offer is meaningless. In our anguish what can we do ? We can only sob, and sob.

ANNA ASPER (*entering from left*). Has the crisis arrived ? Quick, tell me ! Is there aught I can do ?

STULTZ. Nothing, Anna Asper. The dead ask for no service. Yes ; draw the curtain. (*Anna Asper draws the blind over the window at rear.*) 'Tis seemly and proper. It is Brenda we must think of.

ANNA ASPER. Poor Brenda ! My poor child.

STULTZ. 'Twould be well if you could lead her away. Can you not try ? You may persuade her.

ANNA ASPER (*to Brenda*). Brenda, Brenda, my darling ! Do you not hear me ? It is I, Anna Asper—your old Aunt, Anna Asper, who is speaking. Will you not come with me, and tell me of your grief ?

## THE SMITHY

Ah, come, my love, and we will cry together. Two women, only two women. For my heart bleeds with yours. That is a brave little woman! Let us go to your room.

*(She leads Brenda out through the left.)*

STULTZ (*musingly*). Only an instant—a sudden gasp—a catching of the breath—and then—the barrier of eternity. Wife, husband, or child, the farewell is for ever. Only *one* rests quietly, with neither regrets nor desires—and for that one we mourn.

*(Pastor Anker opens the door at rear.)*

ANKER. 'Tis an ugly storm that is gathering. We shall have it within the hour. Are you engaged, Stultz—professionally engaged?

STULTZ (*turning*). No. My professional services have ended. Why have you come?

ANKER. I have just heard that this young Masson had gone. This place lay on my way home, so I have seized the opportunity to say a word to this foolish young Felder. If he choose to acknowledge his error and undergo some act of public penitence, the Church may yet extend a pardon.



## THE SMITHY

STULTZ (*with irony*). You have great eloquence, Pastor Anker ; but I do not think you will move him.

ANKER. We shall see.

STULTZ. You are determined ?

ANKER. That is my purpose.

STULTZ. Then do not delay. You would speak to him ! (*Drawing back the cloth from Aurèle's face.*) The man you seek is here.

ANKER (*with a start*). My God ! The face is bloodless and white (*touching the body*), and growing stiff and rigid. The man is lifeless. Stultz, what is the meaning ?

STULTZ (*replacing the rug*). The meaning is, that he will not listen to your exhortation. The meaning is, that he will not sue to you or your Church for pardon. The meaning is, that you come too late. To your office he is indifferent. Your rôle as judge is played, Pastor Anker. Aurèle Felder now stands at a higher tribunal, and one that will not judge him harshly.

ANKER. I did not expect this—the suddenness has upset me. And cut off in his errors, unreconciled ! The thought is terrible.

STULTZ (*coldly*). Yet, despite them, he sleeps peacefully. I tell you frankly, to this man is attached no blame. He went his way

## THE SMITHY

according to his lights, honestly and bravely. What was right in his eyes he faithfully followed. It led to no advantage—no gain ; yet from that path he never wavered. The blame lies with those who robbed him of his industry, who withheld the hand of fellowship, and forgot the greatest of all virtues—charity.

ANKER. Do you seek to place the blame on me ? Of his death I am guiltless. I stood for the highest—for the perfect Truth. This result I could not foresee, nor hinder.

STULTZ. Then why meddle, man, with what was beyond your narrow vision ? Of his death, *I* do not hold you guiltless. His sickness, true, is not of your doing ; but his death—I will not mince words—is a different matter. With proper nourishment he might have recovered—'twas the only hope—and that was denied. Milk and bread may suffice for children—not for men. And in this house no more has entered for weeks. I tendered something, but it was waived aside. The deepest poverty will not uncover itself. And, lacking nourishment, the chance was lost.

## THE SMITHY

ANKER. Would he have accepted it from me, when it was spurned elsewhere ?

STULTZ. From you or from me, or from any one, he would not accept charity. He asked for justice, for the right to live by the work of his hands. And his trade was ruined, his work at the Church stopped. When hope is absent the physician can do little. Men laugh at a broken heart. Disease does not, for it is then sure of its victims.

ANKER (*humbly*). I am sorry, Stultz. I say with humility, I am deeply sorry. I am not a hard man ; all that I have done was prompted by the best of motives. One has to fight sternly against the errors which surround one. I am not hard, but I have acted foolishly (*stepping towards Aurèle*). Friend, in thy life I have grievously wronged thee. Thy pardon I cannot crave. But, as man to man, I humbly acknowledge my fault. It may be, you will understand—and forgive.

STULTZ. Pastor ! I do not question your heart or your zeal. Only a brave man will freely admit his mistakes ; and will show gratitude if the means be displayed to repair them.

## THE SMITHY

ANKER. Show me the way, only show me the way, and if possible I shall better it.

STULTZ. There are others dear to this dead man—his wife and child. The past lies buried—the future we may shape. At present poverty and want is their only outlook. You may shape it otherwise, if you act properly.

ANKER. Speak out, my friend. My duty now is clear. To do that is sufficient in itself. I need no persuasion.

STULTZ. The thought is born of the instant. Her home now should be her father's house; but father and daughter are estranged. The smith is stubborn, unforgiving. Even Felder's death and his daughter's beggary will not move him if he be allowed to nurse his wrath. Be first and break the news yourself. Take with you the wife and child. Your conveyance is outside. Within the hour you will be there. Let us grant the smith the hardest of natures, yet it should melt, it *will* melt, in the shock of such utter misery.

ANKER. Your proposal sounds promising. I am willing. But the wife, will she come—will she leave her husband?

STULTZ. I shall advise her. There is one lever

## THE SMITHY

—the child. (*Moving towards door on left.*) Brenda ! Brenda, my child ! Aunt Asper ! Come quickly !

(*Anna Asper and Brenda appear at doorway.*)

My darling, you must dry your tears. Courage for your good husband's sake ! You alone can fulfil his dearest wish. Will you fail at the crisis ?

BRENDA. Oh, Doctor, what can I do ?

STULTZ. Everything, my lass. You are going home, to your father's house. Pastor Anker is here, and will drive you. There is no time to be lost. He will explain all to you on the way.

BRENDA (*startled*). To my father's home ! And leave him, my husband ! I cannot. Oh, do not force me.

STULTZ. I would not ask you, Brenda, if it were not for his sake and yours. For think ! To you he has confided the greatest trust, the deepest token of his love—the child yonder. It goes with you, for we are playing for its future. You have always believed in me ; do not doubt me now.

BRENDA. I will go if you tell me.

STULTZ. My brave little woman. (*To Anna*

## THE SMITHY

*Asper*) A cloak! (*Anna Asper hands her cloak which is lying on chair in centre.*) That will give shelter from the coming storm—and wraps for the child. Quickly, Anna Asper! There is my overcoat—that will do. (*Anna Asper wraps the child in Stultz's overcoat and hands it to Brenda.*) Now, Anker, lose not a moment. Drive as fast as you can. (*A slight flash of lightning illumines the room.*) You may outrace the storm. God prosper you, my lass. Have no misgivings. Anna Asper and I will watch over the dead.

CURTAIN.

END OF ACT III.

## ACT IV

The living room in the house of Louis Vautier, as seen in Act I.

The time is evening.

Vautier, Steffan, and Mdme. Vautier are seated at supper. On the table is a lamp. Mère Vautier is dozing in her chair beside the fireplace. For some time the supper proceeds amidst a constrained silence, and an atmosphere of heaviness is present throughout the meal.

VAUTIER (*surlily*). Has no one any voice? Providence has blessed us with sufficient and more than we require. Must we eat it in cold silence?

MDME. VAUTIER. I am thankful, husband. I am sure I am always thankful.

VAUTIER. Then eat, woman! Your plate is almost untouched. And the food is good.

MDME. VAUTIER. Ay, Louis, the food is good, but I have no appetite; I cannot force myself to eat.

## THE SMITHY

VAUTIER. Others would not pass it by.

*(The conversation drops, and the meal is continued for some time in silence.)*

MDME. VAUTIER. May I give you some more, Steffan ?

STEFFAN *(passing his plate)*. Thanks, mistress.

MDME. VAUTIER. And you, husband ?

VAUTIER. No ; I have had enough. I shall finish what I have.

*(Another constrained pause.)*

VAUTIER. 'Twas as well the last summer was a bountiful one. The winter has been severer than usual, and this early summer bodes no good. We shall have heavy storms.

STEFFAN. One is gathering now.

VAUTIER. Oh, you have found your tongue at last ! 'Tis the first time you have opened your lips during the meal.

STEFFAN. I had nothing to say. If one cannot eat without appetite, one cannot speak without desire.

VAUTIER. Do not tax yourself too much, young man.

*(The conversation again flags.)*

MDME. VAUTIER. There is a pasty, husband ! The



## THE SMITHY

one made from your mother's recipe.  
You, Steffan, too ?

VAUTIER. Yes ; give me some. Did the little mother take her bowl of soup to-night ?

MDME. VAUTIER. Nearly all ; she has not been so full of fancies lately.

VAUTIER. You mean dreaming I am a babe again, and always imagining she hears my cry ? Will have it I am lying cradled in one of the other rooms ?

MDME. VAUTIER. Yes.

VAUTIER. The old lady is growing very childish. Sometimes she mistakes me for her good man. There is no use in undeceiving her.

*(A further pause ensues.)*

VAUTIER (*pushing his plate aside*). This is nothing like the old pasty. 'Tis dry and tasteless.

MDME. VAUTIER. I followed, Louis, the instructions exactly.

VAUTIER. You may have, but it is not the same. I tell you it is not the same.

MDME. VAUTIER. I am sorry, but I never had the light hand of Bren—(*Steffan glances quickly at her.*) I mean—I have never

## THE SMITHY

made it for so many years. My hand is growing heavy.

VAUTIER (*retaking his plate*). Perhaps it is merely fancy. (*Hastily*.) Yes; 'tis quite as good. It was never better.

(*Another pause.*)

MDME. VAUTIER. Some more, Steffan?

STEFFAN. No, thank you, Mistress.

MDME. VAUTIER. And you, husband?

VAUTIER. I have finished. Let us offer thanks. (*They all rise.*) "Father, who bestowest all, we humbly acknowledge Thy gifts. With grateful hearts we have partaken thereof. May we not fail in our gratitude, as Thou dost never fail in Thy bounty."

(*They move aside. M<sup>de</sup>me. Vautier proceeds to clear the table.*)

VAUTIER. What do you propose to do, Steffan? Are you going out?

STEFFAN. I was out, Master, all the afternoon. If you do not mind, I will go into the Smithy and repair the old bellows.

VAUTIER. There is no need, my lad. I was idle for an hour, and have overhauled it.

## THE SMITHY

The leather had perished more than I thought.

STEFFAN. Then I will go down into the town. News may have come in from Zurich.

VAUTIER. Only waste of time. Granier, the town clerk, looked in whilst you were away. He says the roads are impassable from the last rains. We need expect nothing for two or three days.

STEFFAN. Then I suppose I must stay here.

VAUTIER. Ay, stay, and we shall read—when the wife has cleared away. I shall read from the Great Book. I will fetch it whilst you get ready. (*He retires through left.*)

STEFFAN (*to M<sup>dme</sup>. Vautier*). Shall I lift the lamp for you, Mistress?

MDME. VAUTIER. If you will, Steffan, so that I can fold the cloth. (*Steffan raises the lamp.*)

STEFFAN. Is it to go here, or on the small table?

MDME. VAUTIER. I suppose the Master will want this. Do you mind holding it for a moment?

STEFFAN (*in a lower voice*). He may rail at our silence, but it prevents mischief. You were nearly dropping Brenda's name when you spoke of the pasty. I am

## THE SMITHY

sure he noticed it from the way he changed.

MDME. VAUTIER. I hope not, Steffan ; I hope not. 'Twas on my tongue and slipped out almost unconsciously. A mother cannot forget. And I repeat it to myself a hundred times a day. Did you see her this afternoon ? Tell me, Steffan, did you see her ?

STEFFAN. Ay, Mistress, I saw her—both her and Aurèle.

MDME. VAUTIER. And how is she ? How is my lassie ?

STEFFAN. She is quite well—a little worn and troubled—she has good cause—but still well.

MDME. VAUTIER. Thank Heaven ! And the little one—my grandson ?

STEFFAN. He was sleeping in his cot—happy and indifferent.

MDME. VAUTIER. And to think I have never seen him—my own grandson ! And may never see him. Sometimes, Steffan, I believe I shall be brave enough, yes, brave enough, to face the consequences. I—I cannot wait much longer. And Aurèle ?

STEFFAN. I left him just the same—no better and no worse.

## THE SMITHY

MDME. VAUTIER. Poor lad ! (*Noticing Vautier re-enter with Bible.*) Here is my man—no more. (*In a louder tone*) That will do. You may put the lamp down. (*Steffan places it on table.*) Do you wish it here, husband ?

VAUTIER. Where you wish. (*He places the large Bible upon the table.*) When you are ready I shall begin.

MDME. VAUTIER. In a few moments, Louis ; I have only this cloth to put aside. Then I shall get my knitting and will not disturb you. (*She moves aside.*)

(*A slight flash of lightning illumines the stage.*)

VAUTIER (*to Steffan*). You might close the shutters. There is no reason why the storm should trouble us. And see, the door is fastened ! We shall not be disturbed by visitors.

STEFFAN. Ay, Master. (*He moves towards window and closes the shutters, afterwards retiring through rear.*)

VAUTIER (*crossing and stooping over Mère Vautier*). Awake, little mother ? Did the lightning startle you ?

MÈRE VAUTIER (*vacantly*). Some one is speaking. Is it you, Louis ?

## THE SMITHY

VAUTIER. Yes I, Mother,—Louis.

MÈRE VAUTIER. My own good man—my dear husband Louis! What has kept you so long away? The day seemed as if it would never end. But you have come back at last.

VAUTIER. Yes. Whatever you please, husband or son; I am here, Mother.

MÈRE VAUTIER. Hush! You must not speak so loud—our boy is sleeping in the room yonder. Speak lower, Louis, or you will wake him.

VAUTIER (*humouring her*). Yes, we will speak very softly.

MÈRE VAUTIER. He has been so restless lately, that I am getting anxious. The others never seem to hear him when he calls. But *I* listen. *I* am always listening, and *I* hear. There! He is awake now, and talking to himself. I miss nothing. He must be playing with his toys—I left them in his cot; for he is laughing and chuckling at some thought. You hear him, Louis?

VAUTIER. Ay, plainly—ever so plainly.

MÈRE VAUTIER. Ah, we will leave him alone whilst he is happy. But there is something on my mind, something I have often intended to ask you about, but I have

## THE SMITHY

always forgotten. Thoughts fade away so quickly. The greater number never come back ; but this *always* returns.

VAUTIER. What is it, Mother ?

MÈRE VAUTIER. 'Twas a long time ago—oh, a long time ago. I cannot recall when. But you will remember, Louis—you will remember. There was a fine betrothal feast—one of the young lasses of the town, I think. I am not sure, for the name I have not heard so long. But it was a gay betrothal—for there were garlands, and feasting, and dancing.

VAUTIER (*restraining himself*). Some stranger perhaps—it may be so—I have forgotten.

MÈRE VAUTIER. No, no ; you must remember, Louis, for you brought me sprays of woodbine and myrtle. And the whole room was bright with flowers. But there was no rosemary. Ah, *now* you will remember ! For you searched and searched, and could not find it. And I said it would prove a sad betrothal—that its absence would bring bad luck ; and you laughed at me, Louis. Ah, you recall it now ! Yes, you laughed at my prophecy.

VAUTIER (*bitterly*). Laughter is for fools. I laugh at nothing.

## THE SMITHY

MÈRE VAUTIER. Was I right, Louis? That is what I want to know. In the end was I right?

VAUTIER (*roughly*). You are only dreaming. I know of no betrothal, so what is the ending to me? (*He turns abruptly and moves towards centre.*)

MÈRE VAUTIER (*to herself.*) No rosemary! (*Chuckling*). Oh, I do not forget everything! They think I do, but I remember—I remember.

VAUTIER (*to M<sup>de</sup>. Vautier, who is standing in centre.*) Are you not finished, Marie? You have had ample time.

MDME. VAUTIER (*seating herself at table*). Yes, I am quite ready. I was only waiting for you.

VAUTIER (*also seating himself*). Then I may begin. (*Looking round.*) But where is Steffan; I did not see him leave?

MDME. VAUTIER. He went, after closing the window. Perhaps he is in his room. Shall I call him?

VAUTIER. No; let him remain! Why should pearls such as lie here be cast before the unwilling? I will not choose the passage, the Spirit shall guide me. (*He opens the Bible at random and proceeds to read.*)



## THE SMITHY

“And he arose and departed and came to Samaria. And as he was at the shearing-house on the way,

“Jehu met with the brethren of Ahaziah, king of Judah, and said, Who are ye? And they answered, We are the brethren of Ahaziah; and we go down to salute the children of the king and the children of the queen.

“And he said, Take them alive. And they took them alive, and slew them at the pit of the shearing-house, even two and forty men; neither left he any of them.

“And when he was departed thence, he lighted on Jehonadab the son of Rechab coming to meet him; and he saluted him, and said to him, Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? And Jehonadab answered, It is. If it be, give me thine hand. And he gave him his hand; and he took him up to him into the chariot.

“And he said, Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord. So they made him ride in his chariot.

“And when he came to Samaria, he slew all that remained unto Ahab in Samaria, till he had destroyed him,

## THE SMITHY

according to the saying of the Lord, which he spake to Elijah.

“And Jehu gathered all the people together and said unto them, Ahab served Baal a little; but Jehu shall serve him much.

“Now therefore call unto me all the prophets of Baal, all his servants, and all his priests; let none be wanting; for I have a great sacrifice to do to Baal; whosoever shall be wanting, he shall not live. But Jehu did it in subtilty, to the intent that he might destroy the worshippers of Baal.

“And Jehu said, Proclaim a solemn assembly for Baal. And they proclaimed it.

“And Jehu sent through all Israel; and all the worshippers of Baal came, so that there was not a man left that came not, and they came into the house of Baal, and he brought them forth vestments.

“And Jehu went, and Jehonadab the son of Rechab, into the house of Baal, and said unto the worshippers of Baal, Search and look that there be here with you none of the servants of the Lord, but the worshippers of Baal only.

## THE SMITHY

“ And when they went in to offer sacrifices and burnt-offerings, Jehu appointed fourscore men without, and said, If any of the men whom I have brought unto your hands escape, he that letteth him go, his life shall be for the life of him.

“ And it came to pass, as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt-offering, that Jehu said to the guard and to the captains, Go in, and slay them ; let none come forth. And they smote them with the edge of the sword ; and the guard and the captains cast them out, and went to the city of the house of Baal.

“ And they brought forth the images out of the house of Baal, and burned them.

“ And they brake down the image of Baal, and brake down the house of Baal, and made it a draught-house unto this day.

“ Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel.”

VAUTIER (*ceasing to read and looking up*). Why, wife, you are weeping ! What has moved you ?

MDME. VAUTIER (*attempting to hide her emotion*). I do not know why. I—I had ceased to

## THE SMITHY

listen. I was thinking—thinking of Brenda.

VAUTIER (*rising*). This is the second time her name has been spoken to-night. First the mother, and now you. For twelve months the name has not been uttered. Can you not let the past lie buried?

MDME. VAUTIER. I did not mean to mention it, husband; indeed, I did not. I have obeyed your wish for so long. The name came without thinking.

VAUTIER. I am not blaming you, wife. Once a weed has grown 'tis not easy to root it out. Curse it! the very iron rings back the name. Each time I strike it echoes, Brenda, Brenda!

MDME. VAUTIER. Oh, Louis, you have not forgotten?

VAUTIER. I never forget. At times I feel his fingers about my throat—the sensation is not pleasant. Pah! my gorge rises at the thought! And that the spawn of François Masson should be the cause, François Masson who led the scum which burned our home and ruined my father! Is it possible to forget? The scene is stamped too deep to be forgotten—the burning farm, my mother's tears, the infuriated mob! Yet what was this

## THE SMITHY

to her or to him? Nothing! They chose their path; but I do not walk therein.

MDME. VAUTIER. I was only thinking of Brenda. Oh, Louis, we forgive a child so much, may not we also forgive when childhood is past?

VAUTIER. No more, wife, no more. When forgiveness confers oblivion, 'tis easy to pardon; but when the wrong will not sleep, 'tis the folly of a fool. If they both flung themselves at my feet, I would not speak with my lips what my heart withheld. I cannot forget, and I will not forgive. We, you and I, must live our own lives. She has followed her choice, let him shelter and support her! *(To Steffan, who has re-entered from rear.)* Well! What is the matter now?

STEFFAN. There is some one making for the forge. A vehicle has passed my window.

VAUTIER. At such a time as this, on such a night. You are losing your wits.

STEFFAN. No; I heard the sound of the wheels, in spite of the storm. It turned off from the lower road. I looked out, but 'twas too dark to see. But it passed, there is not the slightest doubt.

VAUTIER. Some slight accident, perhaps, or they

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would not trouble us so late ! You might go down to the smithy. Should they want assistance they will soon make themselves heard. If necessary, I shall come.

STEFFAN. (*moving across to left*). Ay, Master.

MDME. VAUTIER. 'Tis not the forge. Listen ! They are driving to the front. They must be visitors.

VAUTIER (*with a laugh*). Visitors, and in such wild weather ! Wife ! You must be mad.

STEFFAN (*halting*). Madame Vautier is right. They have stopped under the porch. (*A knocking is heard.*) Ah, there is no mistake now !

VAUTIER. Well, do not stand idly gaping ! To the door, and see what they want ! (*Steffan moves towards door at rear.*) Some strangers possibly who have lost their way. (*Steffan throws open the door and discloses Anker standing outside.*)

STEFFAN (*surprised*). The Pastor !

VAUTIER. You, Pastor ! What can have happened ? Come in, friend ! The night is cosier here than without.

ANKER (*advancing*). Yes, the night is the wildest we have had for years. I was caught halfway by the storm. At times the hills seemed aflame. Above Gauder's

## THE SMITHY

a tree was struck by lightning. We could hear the crash as it fell.

VAUTIER. You say "we." Had you a companion ?

ANKER (*evasively*). Er, yes. At that time—yes. I was bringing a young girl home.

VAUTIER. Well, no one was hurt ; we should be thankful. On occasions the lightning plays fantastic freaks. Doctor Stultz told me of a case which came under his notice. The man was ploughing at the time the bolt fell. His horse was killed, and the plough twisted and bent out of all shape, yet the man escaped without an injury. At least only his clothes suffered ; but they were singed and burnt, and even his boots were torn to shreds. 'Tis strange.

ANKER. Yes, I remember the instance.

VAUTIER. You must stay with us until the storm is over. Steffan will see to your horse. (*To Steffan.*) Take it round to the barn.

STEFFAN. Very well, Master ?

ANKER. No, there is no need. Stay where you are. I am come upon an errand of mercy—to undo a grievous wrong—and I remain only until it is accomplished.

VAUTIER. Surely you and I, Pastor, have no wrongs to undo.

## THE SMITHY

ANKER. I thought so, too, until an hour ago. Now, I know differently. And you and I, friend Vautier, stand upon the same ground. Both share the wrong-doing ; it rests with both to make reparation.

VAUTIER. If I have erred with you, the fault must be a slight one.

ANKER. Would to Heaven it were ! True, we have walked according to the letter of the law ; but Stultz was right—you remember what he once said—in our reading, Love had no place.

VAUTIER. Our friend Stultz was always weak-hearted and foolish.

ANKER. Grant it. But 'tis the weak-hearted who are charitable, not the strong ; 'tis the foolish who are forgiving, not the wise. In our wisdom and strength we lose touch with humanity.

VAUTIER. I do not understand your change of views. The harvest of the earth is not garnered with dallying, but with the sweat of toil. And in olden times, Pastor Anker (*laying his hand upon the Bible*), men were not swayed by idle sentiment. They smote and did not spare. Is it not written here how Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab, and his reward for so doing ?



## THE SMITHY

ANKER. Who will question it, my friend? Not I, for my whole life has been tintured and governed by the spirit of Judaism. I wielded the sword, and put out of sight the olive-branch.

VAUTIER. I am satisfied with the example set before us.

ANKER. I also. But I am slowly beginning to comprehend. We are not Jehu's, nor are our foes of the house of Ahab. Stultz was right—Love is the greater law. Vautier, you must listen to me! I am not here to play the part of accuser—to point out your shortcomings, or place my finger upon your faults. I stand here under the same guilt; perhaps the greater as being the teacher. Every word I utter is a judgment also on myself; and when a man bows his own head, surely another will submit.

VAUTIER. I am ready to listen.

ANKER. 'Tis well, my friend. Twelve months ago a shadow fell across this threshold—a lad was foolish, a lass unwise. There is small need for further words. The folly called for discipline, necessitated reproof; and the office fell on you and me. I counselled, and you acted. So far, there lies no wrong to justify. But

## THE SMITHY

where we erred was in the measure of our punishment. The sentence should be proportionate to the offence ; for when it overweighs the fault, another wrong is born. The punishment itself becomes a crime, and they who judge must answer for it.

VAUTIER. Do not stop ! You have a patient listener.

ANKER. From Aurèle Felder, for his folly, we demanded everything—the fruits of his handiwork, the right to live, the bond of fellowship. And the result was poverty, an unvoiced poverty. With it was coupled sickness. Friend Vautier, it is from there I come. Tancrède Masson has left. We have erred in our severity. 'Tis for us—for you and me—to reconsider our judgment. His fault has been repaid a hundredfold. Let us be just and forgive.

VAUTIER. And you have finished ?

ANKER. What more is there to say ?

VAUTIER. Then hear me. You appeal to justice ! I ask no more. To my demand that this young renegade should go he returned a refusal ; to my command that he should not enter these doors he gave no heed ; and when I found him here, locked in the

## THE SMITHY

arms of his mistress, he gave me the lie; his fingers have gripped my throat. Do you think a man ever forgets such a grip? I cannot. You ask *me* to crawl to his feet for forgiveness. Never, Pastor Anker, never! I care not whether he live or starve. If pardon is to be sought, let Aurèle Felder creep here, and cringe for it. Ay, and cringe for it.

ANKER. Aurèle Felder will ask forgiveness of no man, I tell you. I have just come from his house. He will not leave it again. Aurèle Felder is dead.

MDME. VAUTIER (*with a cry*). Aurèle dead! Ah, Brenda, my daughter Brenda! (*Sobbing, she sinks into a chair.*)

VAUTIER. 'Tis the hand of God. As one sows, so also is the reaping. The measure is in His hands. And if sparely or lavishly it be meted out, who may question it? You speak of Justice! Then what justice is greater than that of Heaven? Death is the wage of Sin—so runs the doom. And if one has paid the penalty, there is no need to shudder. *His* is the Judgment.

ANKER. Man, will you not see for whom I speak? What is *your* forgiveness, granted or withheld, to do with death? The dead

## THE SMITHY

sleep on indifferent. But the living—'tis they who call for our pity and our love. I speak for Brenda and her child. Stricken, she stands alone in the world ; and if *this* prove not to be her home, she has none. Let the past lie buried, Vautier, my friend. I bring you your daughter again. Will you not welcome her ?

VAUTIER. Pastor ! Let us understand one another—once and for always. Daughter ! I have no daughter. I have wrenched from my heart all memory and love that filled it once. Think you, without a pang ? No, no, a hundred times, no ! 'Twas rooted too deep. But the result is achieved. The love is crushed and stifled, and now the name itself awakens no echo. Above all I have recorded a vow in Heaven—a vow never to set my eyes on her again. I shall not break it ; yet, failing, may God remember. If she stood here, if midst a storm such as this she sought to return, I would not receive her. I have no child.

*(During the latter dialogue Brenda has entered through rear, and now stands in the open doorway with her child in her arms.)*

## THE SMITHY

BRENDA (*with an appealing cry*). Father ! Father !

STEFFAN. 'Tis Brenda !

MDME. VAUTIER. Ah, Brenda, my darling Brenda !

ANKER. I have brought her home. Will you refuse a shelter ?

(*Vautier gazes fixedly towards the front.*)

ANKER. Vautier, in the name of charity, speak ! Have you no ears for such a cry ? Bend whilst the moment calls, this is no time for dumbness.

MDME. VAUTIER (*approaching her husband*). Husband, dear husband, listen to me.

VAUTIER (*quietly putting her away*). Stand aside, Marie ! You can do nothing. My God is more to me than kith and kin. I have sworn, and I will not break my vow. She may stay or go, as she pleases. But if she stay, I depart. This roof does not cover both.

ANKER. Faugh ! Idle words are not remembered, and rash vows are not registered above. Without wrong, you may welcome her.

VAUTIER. Idle words, you say ! I alone am judge of their sincerity. I will not swerve. She comes not into my sight.

## THE SMITHY

BRENDA. Ah, never—never again.

*(She rushes out into the darkness.)*

STEFFAN. Brenda has gone. For God's sake, follow me quickly. If she take the lower path she is lost. The Seyon is in full flood; the footbridge has been carried away. *(He passes out hurriedly.)*

ANKER *(seizing Vautier by the arm)*. Man, stir yourself! Her life and the child's is at stake. Hark, Louis Vautier! For should they perish, on thy brow thou shalt bear the brand of Cain, and all thy vows shall not remove it. Go, I command you!

VAUTIER. Then in God's hand lies the issue. I go. *(He follows Steffan.)*

ANKER *(to Mme. Vautier)*. The lamp! Give me the lamp, quickly! *(Mme. Vautier hands him the lamp from centre table.)* It may assist them for a moment. *(He holds it before the open door.)* Ah, it is useless—the lightning shows better. *(He hands it back to Mme. Vautier.)* Steffan is hastening across the meadow, and Vautier is taking the path. Of Brenda I can see not a sign.

MDME. VAUTIER. Oh, Pastor, this morning I saw

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the Veyron rushing and foaming down the gorge. Nothing could live in it.

ANKER. Have courage, Mistress, one or the other must stay her before she reaches it. They *must* overtake her.

MDME. VAUTIER. Oh, Brenda ! There is no hope.

ANKER. Patience. It may be Heaven's reconciliation when other means have failed. Do you stay here. I must also go. *(He retires into the night.)*

*(Meanwhile the storm without gradually grows in violence. At intervals flashes of sheet lightning illumine the stage, followed by the sudden roll of distant thunder. Mère Vautier is awakened by the same, and rises from her seat upon the right.)*

MÈRE VAUTIER *(muttering to herself)*. There were voices ; I am sure I heard voices. But my eyes were tired, and I just closed them. But there were voices. I know some one was speaking. Now the room sounds empty. I—I—cannot be left alone. Ah, Louis, Louis !

MDME. VAUTIER *(moving towards her)*. Ah, mother, have you wakened ? Do you want for anything ? What can I do ?

MÈRE VAUTIER. Eh ! The place is not deserted !

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Some one is speaking. I cannot catch everything. Who is talking to me ?

MDME. VAUTIER. Only Marie, your daughter-in-law.

MÈRE VAUTIER. Marie ! Ah, yes, Marie ! But there were others here, were there not ? It could not be mere fancy. What has become of them ?

MDME. VAUTIER. Merely, the Pastor. God ! how long will they be ?

MÈRE VAUTIER. So it was the Pastor ! And he left without seeing me ? And Louis gone with him ?

MDME. VAUTIER. Yes, Mother.

MÈRE VAUTIER. Eh, the man must be daft to go tramping about on such a night. And both were angry. Theirs were the voices I heard ; what were they quarrelling about ?

MDME. VAUTIER. Ah, Mother ! Louis, my good man, has been so hard, so stern—and Aurèle and Brenda—Oh, I cannot tell you all ; and the Pastor came to try and soften his wrath.

MÈRE VAUTIER. So the Pastor thought to soften Louis, my stubborn son Louis ! (*Chuckling.*) He will be a strong man if he can sway him. Even I could not bend him. As a child, if he said nay, it was nay.



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There was no altering it. No one could ever break him, my big boy Louis. And the pastor will be a brave little man to move him—a brave little man. Will you give me your arm, Marie? I shall walk about the room for a while.

MDME. VAUTIER (*offering her arm*). Yes, lean on me. Will they never come back? (*They move a few paces.*)

MÈRE VAUTIER. Why are you trembling? Of what are you afraid? Eh, child, I can hear your heart throbbing and throbbing. Oh, I hear many things that you never dream of. You have no time to listen. Do not trouble, my child. Youth has many fears, which vanish as one grows older.

MDME. VAUTIER. How can I tell her, with her wits wandering, and her deafness? Mother, Brenda is in danger, and my man and Steffan and the Pastor have gone to save her.

MÈRE VAUTIER (*vacantly*). Oh, Brenda, Brenda, did you say? The name recalls something. Ah, I remember now. Brenda was the name of the lass who was betrothed without rosemary. I asked him about her, not so long ago, and he could not remember. But I have not for-

## THE SMITHY

gotten. There was woodbine and myrtle and sweet-briar—but no sprig of rosemary. You can tell me. Did not the maid wed sorrows and misfortune ?

MDME. VAUTIER. Sorrows ! They have never left her ; they have never left her.

MÈRE VAUTIER. Ah, I knew I was right. Yet he laughed at my fancies. Fancies he called them. *A vivid flash of lightning is seen, followed quickly by a crash of thunder.*)

MDME. VAUTIER (*terrified*). Oh, God, what has happened ? Have mercy on us, have mercy on us !

MÈRE VAUTIER (*with fierce intensity*). Hush, woman ! for Heaven's sake, listen, listen ! There was a cry—a cry of pain. Listen ! There it is again. 'Tis Louis, my brave son Louis, who is calling. Take me to him—oh, take me to him. He is calling for me.

MDME. VAUTIER. You cannot go, you cannot. The storm is at its worst.

MÈRE VAUTIER. What are storms to me ? He is my boy, and I am his mother.

(*Steffan enters from rear.*)

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MDME. VAUTIER. Ah, here is Steffan. Oh, Steffan, what has occurred? Is Brenda—is Brenda saved?

STEFFAN. Brenda, Mistress, is safe, and the child. I lost her in the darkness; but on the brink of the Seyon, on the very brink, she was stopped by the Master, and his arms gripped her tightly.

MDME. VAUTIER. You are sure, Steffan; you are sure?

STEFFAN. There is no question. They are coming back hand in hand.

MDME. VAUTIER (*hysterically*). Oh, Mother, they are coming back—Brenda and Louis. He swore never to look upon her again, and now they are coming back, hand in hand.

STEFFAN. Nay, Mistress, prepare yourself. The Master will not see her again. I cannot say how it happened, but at the moment he reached her the darkness burst into flame. There was a sharp cry—I can tell no more. Now they are returning, but Brenda is leading him. He will not break his vow. The Master is blind.

*(Vautier enters at rear, led by Brenda. They are followed by Anker.)*

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MDME. VAUTIER (*advancing towards them*). Ah, Louis, my own good man ! It is not true.

VAUTIER. Ay, Marie, it is true. Night has closed in, and I walk now amidst shadows. Henceforth I commune only with voices—all else are but dreams.

MDME. VAUTIER. Ah, look, husband, look ! You must surely see me.

VAUTIER. No, Marie ; neither now nor ever. I live in darkness. But fret not, my wife, for I return with a treasure a hundredfold greater than I have lost. Brenda has come home. For the future she remains here. There is no longer a barrier. She leaves us no more.

MDME. VAUTIER. And you have saved her ! You give her to me again ! You, husband, only you !

VAUTIER. Not I. I can claim no credit. Once I should have—I am humbler now. Cling to one another ! I have separated you too long.

BRENDA. But you, father ?

VAUTIER. Do not trouble over me, my girl. For years I have gloried in my strength ; let me grow acquainted with my weakness. I have to learn ; why delay ? No, leave me to myself ! (*He feels his*

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*way with hesitating steps towards the centre, halting at the chair he occupied when previously reading.)* This should help me. Ah, yes, 'tis the chair made by myself from the old elm in the meadow. 'Twill outlast me, for the wood was sound, and the workmanship honest. My labour will never shame me. Now, I can gather my little world. Ten paces should lead me to my bedroom, and about the same to the hearth. On my right, almost within touch, should be the large table; and over yonder the little mother's seat. My mother! I had forgotten her. We are at one now, in our weakness and our helplessness. (*He gropes towards where Mère Vautier is seated.*) You are awake, Mother?

MÈRE VAUTIER (*with intentness*). Awake! How could I sleep when you were away? I heard you call, but they would not take me to you. I knew you were in danger. But you have come back, Louis, come back safely?

VAUTIER. Ay, Mother, there was naught to worry you.

MÈRE VAUTIER. And you have suffered no harm; you are not hurt, my son?

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VAUTIER. You must not think so much of me. I am too strong to be hurt. Feel my big rough hands.

MÈRE VAUTIER (*grasping same after blindly feeling for them*). Ah, yes, I am satisfied now. I should break down if aught happened to you. I have only you to care for—you only, Louis — my brave boy Louis.

VAUTIER. Then rest peacefully, Mother. As for me, I have something to undo—something that will brook no delay. The means are at hand. (*He moves towards the small centre table and passes his right hand to and fro across its surface, as if feeling for some object.*)

VAUTIER. It should be here ; it should be here. This is the table at which I was reading. (*Touching the Bible.*) Ah, yes, it has not been moved. This Book bears witness to the greatness of my offence. Again it shall bear witness ; but this time to the fulness of my expiation. Pastor, Marie, and you, Brenda my child, give me your hearing ! In these pages there has been vouchsafed, to all who care to learn, a noble Pattern and Example—the life of One who lived

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in charity with all, and preached no gospel except that of love. 'Tis here for all to read ; but I, like others, read therein such only as I wished to find. In my pride and confidence I missed the path. I would not stoop, and scorned to ask the way. Far have I wandered, but now I stray no more. Darkness has stayed my steps. Like Samson I have fallen, and my power is naught. For even, as with him, the Lord has shorn me of my strength and robbed me of my boast. Yet in His mercy, my punishment is less. Unto my enemies He has not delivered me ; He has spared me *that*. For in my arrogance I dared to make a pact with God. In my vain-glory I besought Him to record a vow—a vow, the offspring of an angry passion—and should I fail therein, to mete me out the fullest measure of His wrath. And God has spoken. He has stretched forth His hand and judged—yet not in wrath, nor in the strength of His majesty. With what mercy ye are witnesses ! For where in justice He might have struck, He has but touched me. In His kindness He has spared me life. 'Tis enough that I walk in the shadows of

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Night. Still a duty remains, and it shall not rest unsatisfied. Do you, Pastor, assist me to fulfil it. Steffan, my lad, bring ink and pens! (*Steffan places same on centre table.*) Place them here! You, Pastor, seat yourself. (*Anker seats himself.*) You are ready, my friend?

ANKER. Ay, ready.

VAUTIER. Then take the sacred volume. Within it you will find our family line. Not all. Turn o'er the leaves, for one is missing. You have found the place?

ANKER. Yes, it is here.

VAUTIER. Then write! Each word must stand as it stood before. "Also Brenda, their only child, born July 6, 1622. In the night she came, into the night she passed, and in the night she has returned." You have written?

ANKER. Yes.

VAUTIER. Then, Pastor, give me the Book. (*He takes the open Bible in his hands.*) At last, the record is true. Behold, O God, my expiation! Thy Wisdom, I acknowledge; Thy Justice, I do not question. Humbly, I receive Thy chas-



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tisement. Deal not with me as I have dealt. If I, in my strength, have forgotten, do Thou in my weakness remember me.

*CURTAIN.*

THE END OF THE PLAY.

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# THE DIVINE ARETINO

(Reviews—continued)

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## THE DIVINE ARETINO

(Reviews—continued)

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“Fulke—You forget your name is one of the noblest in England, whilst this other [Aretino] can show no quarterings except a bend sinister.

“Hathern—Yet there is none so famous in Italy, perhaps in the world. Surely, 'tis a greater honour to rest on one's own merit than find support on a forgotten ancestor?

“Fulke—An admirable assertion, Harry, generally credited. But false, absolutely false. We were speaking of marriage. You do not marry this gifted scribbler, but one of his people. And one who bears the brand of his birth without a scintilla of his talents. No, my lord, 'tis well to remember that Genius is personal, but Rank inseparable.

“Hathern (bitterly)—And is there no virtue outside a narrow caste? One would think that honour was the birthright of a privileged few.”

“Fulke—Seek you Honour or Virtue? Will you find it here? His mother, Tita, a courtesan; his father, some say Luigi Vacchi, some mention other names. The choice is unlimited. Do you seek for Honour? Then take his career. He fled from Arezzo after disfiguring a sacred picture. At Rome he entered the service of Chigi, the banker, as a common scullion, and was dismissed, 'tis said, for theft. Somehow he drifted into literature; and a venomous tongue, a scurrilous pen, has won him notoriety where otherwise he would have failed. For 'tis easier to tickle certain passions of the crowd than give the world one noble thought. Some bribed his pen to silence. Some, like our late Ambassador, thrashed him for his insolence. As regards his talents, I will not deny them; but they have been prostituted to one aim—the raking in of money. His boast is that his pen is gold, or steel, according to the price. I think, my lord, we need not further discuss his honour.

“Hathern (coldly)—For a friend, a friend about to enter his house, I think the subject has been discussed enough.

“Fulke—Tush! If our visiting-list was founded on respect, it would be small indeed. A little feeling of contempt, a little sense of superiority, and one can afford to be charitable.”

“To Scottish readers *The White Rose* possesses a peculiar interest, but they will have some difficulty in identifying 'the hero of the Forty-five' with the nerveless Count of Albany, incapable of a manly resolve, whose besotted condition is the despair and the shame of the followers who have remained faithful through all vicissitudes. The tragedy, which is full of dramatic passages, concludes with the death of the Prince, whose last thoughts are of the clansmen who had so bravely fought and died in his cause. An impressive figure is Henry, Cardinal of York, the last representative of the House of Stuart, who gives eloquent expression to his sense of the futility of seeking to regain the throne of his ancestors. 'These prizes do not tempt me. To seize them spells death to many a noble heart—spells ruin to many a happy household—misery and the horrors of war. For what? That one may call himself a king, and for a brief period strut it o'er his fellows. No, my choice is made. Here lies my life. Here, my subjects, the poor and suffering. In the scroll of history I shall not figure. The world will pass me by with a shrug of contempt. But a few will understand. For I stand aside—not from fear, but charity.